DE LA ROSA GRUENWALD HOUSTON
BLYBERG THOMPSON
WOWEEKAZOWIE!
№ 4
$1.50
Shazam! © DC Comics
WAB+SDELAROSA

The search for more GOLDEN AGE angles goes on —

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

HANLEY '76

ANSWERS ① ETTA was Wonder Woman's pal. She dropped out of the scene and married ⑤ DOIBY DICKLES who was Green Lantern's pal. Both died of obesity not recently. ② SQUEEKY was the monkey pet of Crimebuster. He had his own comic. ③ Capt. Midnight's pal, IKKY MUDD ④ Created for The Flash by Marty 'No-Neck' Naydel. ⑥ A crook until Wildcat set him straight. ⑦ Don 'Land, Air, Sea' Winslow's buddy in the Navy, U.S. ⑧ Plastic Man. The original Woozy went on to become Spiro Agnew ⑨ Johnny Quick ⑩ The Spectre, would ja believe? ⑪ Slam Bradley ⑫ Hop Harrigan ⑬ Robotman ⑭ Kerry Drake ⑮⑯ Terry ⑰ Sargon ⑱ Superman ⑲ Actually, adventure relief for funny Johnny Thunder ⑳?

A hale and hearty "Hi, there!," to all of you below and/or isn't it grand to see your name in print! (I'm not above a token remuneration for the effort. I had to pay for this book somehow, y'know!) Sky Besco, Brad B. Becker, Bruce Burke, Harry Broertjes, Mike Catron, Meloney Crawford, P. Winslow Crawford, Kean F. P. Crowe, John Dickan, Lorraine Dickan, Cindy Dickan (sorry about that, Cindy, I never found out your married name!), Randy Elliott, Kurt Erichsen, George Erling, Gary L. Evans, Mark Gaspar, Fred and Nancy Greenberg, Gary Groth, Ted Hanes, David Heath, Jr., Don Herrig, Doug Herring, Dan Hoffman, Rich Howell, Doc Hurst, Tom Hegeman, John and Rae Ann Iavarone, Corbett Innes, Peter Kuper, Bill Dale Marcinko, Rose Marconi (how's school?), Tom Mason, Scott McLeod, Emil Novak, George Olshevsky, Frederick Pacer, Bill Paul (Chankh!), Don Puff, Fritz Puff, Jamie Puff, Chris Rock, Jack Robinson, Bob Rodi, Charles "Chuck" Seeley, Joltin' Joe Sinnott, Bill Sherman, Dave and Deni Sim, Woody Smith, Joe and Hilary Staton, Bill and Lisa Turner, not least but certainly last, Ron Van Leeuwen.

WOWEEKAZOWIE!

FALL-WINTER 1978 ISSUE

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The front cover featuring CAPTAIN MARVEL is by Willie Blyberg, Sam de la Rosa and Pete Iro.
The back cover featuring BLACKMARK is by his creator, Gil Kane.

Contributors to this issue:

MARILYN BETHKE
WILLIE BLYBERG
PETE BOTSIS
GENE DAY
SAM DE LA ROSA
MARK GRUENWALD
JIM HANLEY
GAR HAYWOOD
FRED HEMBECK
LARRY HOUSTON
DENNIS JENSEN
GIL KANE
KARL KESEL
FRANK LOVECE
MIKE MACHLAN
DEAN MULLANEY
BILL NEVILLE
JERRY ORDWAY
CHARLEY PARKER
GENE PHILLIPS
ROBB PHIPPS
CARL TAYLOR
KIM THOMPSON
BILL WU

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WOWEEKAZOWIE!

EDITORIAL!

Can you believe it? It's been only three months since WOWEE #3 came out. You know what that means, folks? It means that this issue of WOWEE is the first to actually come out on time! At this rate we'll be going weekly before long!

We start off this ish with a piece by Merry MARK GRUENWALD on what he feels should be one of fandom's top priorities. Masterful MARILYN BETHKE decides to prove she's a nice person after all, and not severely insult too many things at once (Uh-oh! Just kidding, o Masterful One! Howzabout pointing that shotgun in a slightly different direction, like away from me? ...Whew!), and contributes an essay on Stan Lee, the editor/publisher/salesman/carny barker and his relationship with his audience.

Slim KIM THOMPSON bucks for a job with Gene Colan (Whatsamatter, ain't G. G. throwing you enough raw burger, lately?), and if you've been keeping abreast of Mr. C. lately you might actually think Kim was serious in his piece.

Fearless FRANK LOVECE waxes intellectual and wants us to believe that hhere's more to comics than "Holy Moley!" and "SWOKK!" He also wants me to mention that he's a communications major (O. K. Frank, you can release my family now!).

Genial GENE PHILLIPS points out that DC comics are breaking out with pimples, and more flesh-tone, while I start inflicting upon you the first of my regular-to-be columns.

Dashing DEAN-MULLANEY proves he's not Mort Weisinger by remaining alive and putting together this issue's letter col. Also, Wild BILL WU offers an overview of Asian roles in the pages of comics.

On the art front, Woodstruck WILLIE BLYBERG and Snappy SAM DE LA ROSA are responsible for this issue's smashing cover, while JIM (Henceforth) HANLEY is irresponsible for bringing us up to date on Golden Age second bananas.

Riotous ROBB PHIPPS and the Snappy One do a smash-up job on Fearless Frank's NIMBUS strip, revived here, and updated by Frank since his last appearance a few years back in DES and ARV JONES' zine, THE FAN INFORMER.

Formerly Woodstruck, now Wiley WILLIE B. continues his VICTORY series in its grand style, while Leapin' LARRY HOUSTON, Groovy GAR HAYWOOD and yours truly contribute THE OMEGON strip. THE OMEGON, as you know, is a member of THE ENFORCERS and appears regularly in that title.

Merry MARK G. brings us, with Dastardly DENNIS JENSEN's assist on inks, a first, a super-hero with a switch, in GAY BLADE.

Rounding out the contents are spots by Jack-of-all-trades GENE DAY, Blushin' BILL NEVILLE, Neat PETE BOTSIS, KARL (the Kid) KESEL, Calamitous CARL TAYLOR and a spiffy back cover by ol' Sugar Lips himself, GIL KANE. I must also make special mention of Jay-walkin' JERRY ORDWAY and Mighty MIKE MACHLAN for coming to my rescue when I needed them. (No, that was BILL-DALE (I'm-such-a-victim) MARCINKO of AFTA infamy that got beat up by a bunch of irate fans for no special reason, it seems. I meant to my editorial rescue.) Thanks a million, everybody, and especially thanx to JERRY and MIKE!!

Next issue, if Dormammu doesn't strike, should be out in late February, early March, and should contain the ongoing saga of VICTORY, as well as the continuation of THE OMEGON and NIMBUS strips. Also, articles by BILL (Au Groton) TURNER (on STEVE DITKO, based on his correspondence with Mr. D.), DR. RICHARD (Doc) HURST (an update on his "Violence in the Popular Media" thesis he did as a part of his doctorate a few years back), and an article by Slim KIM THOMPSON (on NINO), as well. Also, Wiley WILLIE expressed an interest in doing a column, and if I don't get kidnapped by some Pillsbury dough-boy look-alike in a flying, upside-down city, I'll have a column in it as well.

I had wanted to talk about a few other things, but I'm afraid I've run out of room. You see, I had planned to ramble on for two pages in this editorial, but somewhere along the line I miscounted how much space one of the articles would take up, so here I is...

I also want to apologize to one or two individuals who expected to see some of their work in this ish, but due to the delay in getting this book out (#3 was an issue put out to ward off angry subscribers, but as it turned out, they re are incredibly understanding, or possessed of short memories...), some of the material became outdated and others couldn't be used for a va-i(riety of reasons. Apologies to yous all.

PLUG! AFTA-$2, a total of 208 pages in two 8½" x 5½" books. Interviews with Julie Schwartz and George Perez, more fanzine reviews than you thought you cared to read, a 23 page lettercol, art by Hazelwood, Phipps, de la Rosa, O'Connell, Hembeck, articles and columns by Pilla, Phillips, Cox, an AMERICA \2-NIGHT index, SF, TV, VD, raisins and more!! Marcinko is mad, so before he starts shock treatment, I strongly urge you to take advantage of him by ordering AFTA #2 for only $1.49 at: BILL-DALE MARCINKO, RPO 5009, Rutgers U., New Brunswick, N. J. 08903. YOU CAN'T GO WRONG!!!

WHAT FANKIND NEEDS

by Mark Gruenwald

Amidst various other topics of fanzy conversation and writing, one occasionally hears a discussion of what fankind really needs or what fans really ought to be doing. Since the basis of the fankind phenomenon is the exchange of ideas and information (i.e., communication), discussions generally center on the fan activities dealing with "mass" communication (i.e., writing).

Some claim that what is really needed is a fine general interest comics fanzine, like those fabled ones that existed in the early '60's, comic fankind's beginning. Others say that the so-called "genzines" are passe and the concept has been thoroughly mined; the only meaningful material is found in special interest 'zines, where topics can be explored at length and in depth. Where once a 'zine might be considered "special interest" if it dealt with, say, only Marvel to the exclusion of DC, now one is not "special" until one's focus is narrowed to a single character (like Batman), group (like the Legion), or concept (such as Reality).

Still others feel that the whole concept of "wide" circulation fanzines is obsolete or impractical, and the only viable form of self-expression is found in "egozines" or "personalzines" distributed through limited member collectives called apas (amateur press alliances). Apas free the fan writer from commercial considerations such as catering to mass appeal and/or making a profit, allowing great freedom of content and presentation. On the other side of the coin, usually no more than half a hundred people see one's work.

Others perhaps never feel the need for any self-expressive and collective activities, believing reading and collecting to be ends in themselves. But these are comic readers and comic collectors, not comic fans.

I feel that each of the three fan activities cited have their own valid place in fankind, and none should supplant the other. Fankind, like comics, needs to provide diversity in order to survive. However, as necessary and important as each of these three types of amateur publishing ventures are, there is one type of project which has been largely neglected, the importance of which transcends that of the other types. Moreover, this project is in the better interests of every person who considers an aspect of one's self to be "comics fan."

What I'm talking about is hard, basic research about comics... a compilation of data... comprehensive indexing and summarizing and cataloging about every aspect of the comics medium and what it depicts, in an accessible format that will enable all to use it for whatever purpose.

I'm not talking about mass market histories of the comic book that attempt to cover everything about comics from the '30's through the '70's in a couple of hundred pages (such as Feiffer's The Great Comic Book Heroes, Thompson/Lupoff's All In Color for a Dime, or even potentially the completest of the lot, Steranko's History. Lee's Origins of Marvel Comics and O'Neil's Secret Origins of DC Heroes are barely worth mentioning.)

I'm not talking about overviews, nor analyses, nor interpretations, nor critiques, either. I'm talking about research, for the sake of fans and historians and critics of the medium, not the general market. With the hard facts together, the application of same can begin in earnest.

There are a few extant publications designed for the express purpose of dispensing hard facts. Each of these works has its own scope, focus, and inadequacies. I will briefly review the major projects of the kind so far in order to show why they are no more than a good start.

Fleisher's Encyclopedia series could have said it all. Familiar with both the subject matter and the encyclopedic format, he could have been definitive. Unfortunately, the Fleisher series neglects for the most part ten years of comic history in its analysis of Batman and Wonder Woman, the ten years that most of today's comic readers are familiar with. With the format and projected future volumes in the series, Fleisher clearly does not intend to cover it all, only a handful of major heroes. While this is commercially sound (who would buy a book of research about a hero you never heard of?), it severely limits the scope of the work. The books would have been greatly augmented with an appendix that simply listed each issue of Batman and Detective, date, credits (where known), story titles, and one-sentence synopses. The rest of the in-depth analysis would have been just gravy.

Olshevsky's Marvel Indexes even more so seemed to be the answer to Everyfan's needs. And although the Avengers volume is far better than the Spider-Man one (better layouts, larger cover reproductions, more information), the books all have one serious deficit: lack of story synopses. I conveyed to George what I considered his series' greatest, and his response was that there simply was not enough room to do each issue's plot justice and still get three books to a page. He said he hoped to do an encyclopedia of storylines at a later date. My point is that all information needs to be in one easily-accessible place. In most cases, an issue's content can be digested to a sentence or two. The Marvel Indexes seem designed for those who've read all of the books indexed! The fan who buys them in hopes of catching up on what he missed will be disappointed.

Bails' The Collector's Guide: The First Heroic Age gives an alphabetical listing of all the "Golden Age" heroes, their secret identities, complete appearances, including crossovers (of which there were not many in those days) and writer/artist credits by approximate year. This volume is a valuable source of information but lacks one vital feature: a brief description/origin of each of the heroes. Without such, how is someone who wasn't around in the days that the Green Lama appeared supposed to know anything about him? A sentence or two for each character, stating his powers, modus operandi, origin, and oddities, would have made this book invaluable.

Keltner's Index to Golden Age Comic Books features a complete listing of every feature in every comic book up through the '50's. In and of itself, one can ask no more, but if Bails' Guide were designed to cross-reference the listings here, we'd have everything to know about the "Golden Age" except story synopses.

Pozner's Legion Handbook (Amazing World of DC Comics #9) provides a great overview of fankind's favorite 30th century teens, but it has several serious omissions that undercut its re-

search value. First, despite a listing of everywhere the Legion appeared, there were no story synopses so one knows what they did when they appeared. Second, despite the detailed descriptions of each hero (including several needed continuity implants), there is no listing of each's complete appearances by issue. Third, the extraterrestrial bodies are not indexed as to where they appeared. With these oversights amended, the Handbook would be definitive.

Gruenwald's Justice League of America Reader (in AWoDCC #14) was my attempt at a solid limited-topic research volume. Despite the editors' well-founded notion that lists of issue numbers are unattractive, I managed to insert most of all the statistical material I wanted. The only material I would have included had I published it myself is the sort of minutae that only a JLA zealot would care for anyway. The biggest flaw of the book is the proofreading, and here I must accept partial blame for not browbeating the paste-up crew harder to correct the typoes and omissions I found. Still, with all due pride, if every superhero team book were as exhaustively researched, we'd have a substantial body of work.

The above works were among the most noteworthy attempts at comic research to date. All were designed to bridge the information gap, and fell short of covering their topics adequately. Just what does this guy want then? you may wonder. This:

1.) A complete index to every DC and Marvel story of the Modern Age, much like Olshevsky's but with synopses. In that way, a new reader of Thor could read the accounts of all that has gone before in order to understand what's going on now. One of the problems with starting a comics habit today is there is too much history to catch up on before you can feel comfortable. Old readers with poor memories would be able to locate the issues and titles of stories by their descriptions.

2.) A complete character index to every entity in both DC and Marvel universes. This would include heroes and villains, supporting characters -- everyone except one-name crowdsceners. Each entity would be crossreferenced to its every appearance and would have biographical data. In this way, one coming across the High Evolutionary for the first time could have an index to his every appearance to look up in the previously-described volume.

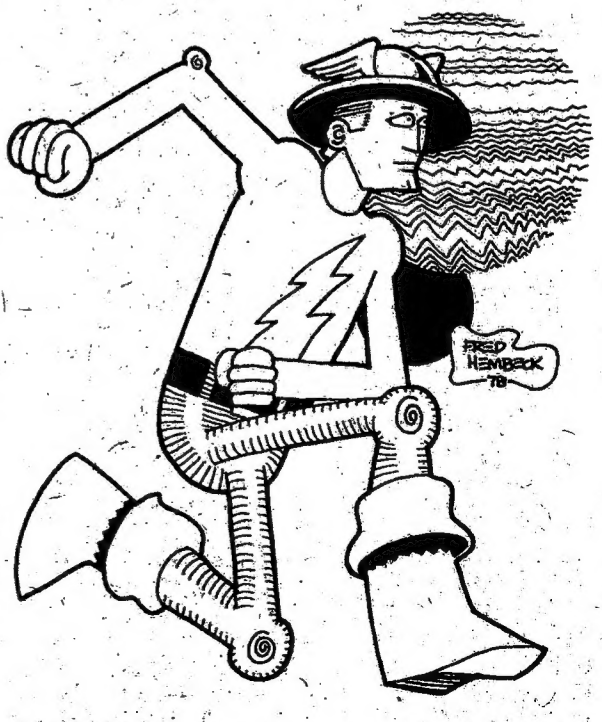
3.) A complete gazateer to every alien world and other dimension in the DC and Marvel multiverses. This would include a list of everywhere that planet (or one of its denizens) appeared, and every thing known about it, perhaps even a skychart could be drafted.

4.) A complete cross-referencing of all writers, artists, editors, etc. and everything they have done in the comics medium. I believe that Jerry Bails is doing something of this sort in his Who's Who of Comic Books. I do not know the extent of his coverage.

What is needed, in summary, is comprehensive, accessible information. Those who would be served by such are: 1) the new reader who could acquaint himself with all the main aspects of the fictional universe of comics he was entering, 2) the old reader/fan who wants an index to his collection and loves information for its own esoteric sake, 3) the comics researcher/historian/critic who wants both an index and a cross-referenced digest of information for every conceivable type of study. If one wanted to do an article on "Time Travel and Superman," one would need only to scan the synopses of the series to find which issues are germane. 4) The professional comics writer/editor. Not only would it be a boon to continuity to have a digest of what has gone before, but it would also serve to avoid repetition in plotting.

This then is the need I perceive. Yes, it's one hell of a project, but it's going to have to be done someday, it's going to be done someday, so it may as well be now while there are still many with complete collections to do the work, and there is only twenty years of modern history to contend with. I consider this as the most noteworthy thing that fans can be doing at present, contributing to the body of information about comics. When it is done, we will have a reference source that will enable scores of articles and projects synthesizing, interpreting, and analyzing the basic information.

But first we've got to get the facts, ma'am, just the facts.



The SELLING of the PUBLISHER

--by MARILYN BETHKE

Stan Lee is single-handedly responsible for one of the biggest innovations in the comic book industry. No, it's not the Marvel style of characterization, giving superheroes problems like "real" people, and it is not the Marvel universe and its interlocking continuity, although both of these are certainly part of Lee's package. The most important part of any advertising or promotional campaign is effective product identification, and Stan Lee has successfully established an extremely advantageous image for Marvel and has used that image to create and manipulate an army of loyal readers. Lee is indisputedly skillful at marketing and promotion, and his tactics have been successful because he understands the cultural significance of comic books and because he has been able to identify certain characteristics of comic book readers and to capitalize (in the most mercenary sense of that word) on those characteristics.

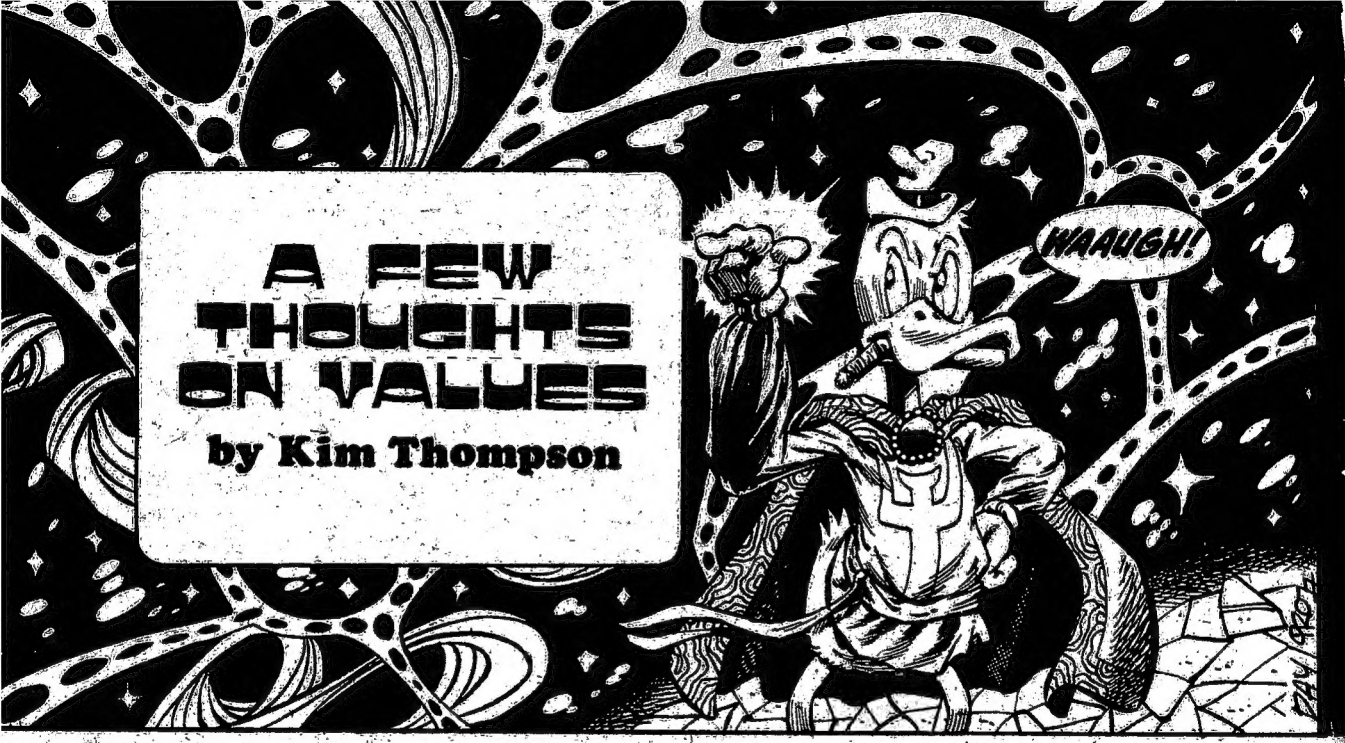
Science fiction fandom has a far better perspective on itself than does comic book fandom, and one theory of the fan phenomenon that is generally respected in science fiction is that fans turn to a particular form of entertainment because of some void in their lives. This is, in fact, a quite valid generalization of childhood experiences. Certain forms of literature provide us with the means to vicariously experience adventure and excitement; comic books is one of these forms. Eventually, though, we recognize these vicarious experiences for what they are, and as we grow up we turn to more satisfying forms of entertainment. This is where Stan Lee and his suffering superheroes come in. The theme of the loser-as-hero is the one unifying motif of Marvel'sheroes and exemplifies some of the most common feelings of adolescents and young young adults. People with problems are naturally going to be drawn to heroes with problems. Stan has always understood this and used it to Marvel's advantage.

All of Stan Lee's hype, from the "Soapbox" to his college lectures, is based on a feeling of belonging, a feeling of fraternity. The readers are made to feel that they are privileged to be on a first name basis with both the heroes (Spidey, Shell Head, Subby, Goldilocks, Cap) and with Marvel's staff (CHEERFUL Chris Claremont, RASCALLY Roy Thomas, Jim TROUBLE Shooter). Marvel is portrayed as more than just a publishing company, and the people who work for Marvel are portrayed as your friends. It is a special--indeed, an elite-- group, and YOU TOO can be a part of this group. This attitude goes back as far as Amazing Fantasy #15, which contained the declaration, "we certainly don't want to embarass ANY of our loyal readers." Stan Lee's "Soapbox" has always had a ring of "Hey, we're all on the same team"-- Marvel's. This exaggerated team spirit often borders on secret society exclusivity, complete with its own code language ('Nuff Said, Excelsior).

The merchandising of Marvel and its various products depends to a great extent on this fabricated team spirit. No self-respecting True Believer can be without Lee's latest book or the Marvel calender, and despite his protests to the contrary, Lee's "Soapbox" is no more than a promotional gimmick, hyping a new product, Marvel or even Stan himself. In a much larger context, the concept of the Marvel universe with its inter-related stories and characters is also part of Lee's marketing strategy. Even if it wasn't done solely as a marketing device, it certainly doesn't hurt to have the story in one book depend (in terms of completely understanding the story line) on the story in another book. Continuity, in this sense, is an extremely effective way to sell more books.

To an adult entering the world of comic books, the self-serving nature of Stan Lee's pronouncements is obvious, but to the kids and young adults who constitute the majority of Marvel's readership Stan Lee's word is gospel. If Stan says that Marvel has never portrayed women or blacks in a derogatory manner, then it must be true. Such distortions are common; the faith in Stan Lee is just as common. As a retailer I've seen the devotion of confirmed Marvelites firsthand, and it is frequently startling. Unfortunately, most of Marvel's readers will never get to compare the hype with either the facts or with Stan Lee's true feelings. There are many examples of this duplicity. His declarations about the female characters of Marvel comics is just one. The man who wrote the words, "Let chauvinism be eschewed. Let quality prevail. Let historians of the future look back upon this era and proudly declare, ''Twas Marvel that led the way!'" is the same man as the one whose instructions for Ms. Marvel's new costume were "more tits 'n' ass." The difference between the May installment of "Soapbox"-- Lee's promise to "leave the hard-sell to the ad pages"-- and the next month's-- "Why knock ourselves out designing an issue of CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, doing the life story of THE BEATLES, coming up with MACHINE MAN, adding SPIDER-WOMAN to our merry menage of costumed cavorters?... it's because of you, kiddo!" -- is absolutely startling, particularly since Stan Lee has since conceded that SPIDER-WOMAN's reason for existence is to protect the copyright.

Stan Lee is-- first and foremost-- a salesman for Marvel Comics, which is no offense in and of itself, but when his position as publisher affords him the opportunity to mislead his readers -- well-- one can't help but question the veracity of all Stan's statements, in both the "Soapbox" and his books. If Stan is so proud of Marvel's college-age audience, perhaps he should begin writing for them, instead of continuing to address his audience as if they were his own personal nation of sheep.



A FEW THOUGHTS ON VALUES

by Kim Thompson

As a comic book artist, Gene Colan does not rank with such adulated greats as Steranko, Smith, Adams, Wrightson, Brunner, Kaluta et al., at least in the minds of most fans. While his recent Shazam! nomination boosted popular esteem for him a bit, the gosh-wow reaction remains outstanding.

As I see it, it is a matter of public relations and mass fan psychology rather than genuine artistic class which differentiates between the loved pro and the merely respected one. Hence, I herewith propose (free of charge) a scheme which would, in less than a year, propulse Gene Colan into the midst of that select elite, the super-pro. It behooves me to mention, however, that none of the procedures is mine to begin with, each having been painstakingly gleaned thru careful observation of the comic book ensemble, fans, pros and books.

First of all, it is blatantly apparent that Colan's grim determination to pencil two books a month is not only suicidal and greedy, but downright foolish as well. Nobody respects an artist who does more than fifteen pages a month (and then, preferably with great difficulty). Either HOWARD THE DUCK or TOMB OF DRACULA should be dropped instantaneously, before Colan's prestige can be further damaged-- probably the latter, since it would suffer much more from a change in artists, and its sagging in the wake of Colan's departure would aggrandize his contribution quite a bit (as the song says, you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone). Also the Duck has more charisma (charisma being proportionate to the price the first issue of a comic brings, divided by its age).

Thruout the entire operation, rumors should be circulated in fandom, to the effect that Colan is planning to drop HOWARD in order to devote himself to painting/collecting butterflies/studying zen/illustrating Justine/photography. There's nothing like a Damocles' Sword of imminent departure from the medium to bring forth cheers from the fans.

Now, procrastination and difficulties are on the order of the day. Deadline-missing is a perennial crowd-pleaser, since it obliges the publisher to fill in with either a poorly-printed reprint or a hack job from a staff artist, again aggrandizing the (almost) regular artist. More delicate, but even more rewarding is the near-deadline-miss, which forces the editor to rush final production, including lettering, inking, and coloring, thus permitting the near-misser to righteously mutter about "atrocious production screwing up my beautiful pencils."

When pressed to the wall (and often very little pressing is necessary), comic book fans will assert that the comic book medium is the greatest artform extant, or at least solidly within the top two. However, when an ex-comic book artist goes over to do single illustrations for paperback books and the like, his previous work is judged to pale into insignificance by comparison. Eerily, a much greater value is then attached to his subsequent comic book work. Ours is not to reason why-- important is that this bizarre procedure works.

So, the next step consists in doing a smattering of illustrations, which will be loved and drooled over and hoarded even if their artistic value is negligible compared to the comic book contributions of the artist.

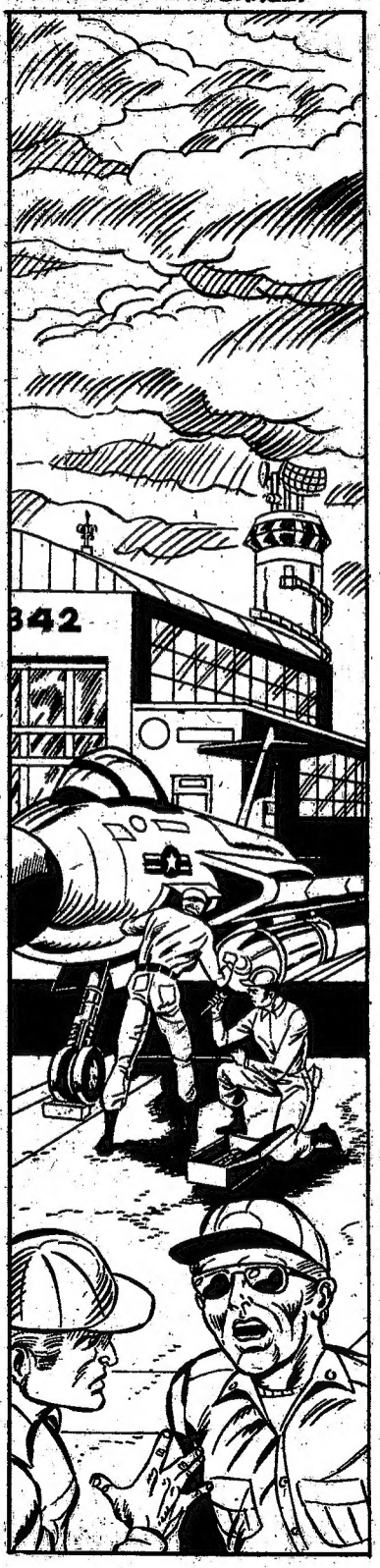
Then comes Operation Ping-Pong, in which the artist (in this case Colan) petulantly abandons his magnum opus (in this case HOWARD) to seek more "challenging," more "rewarding" (of cour$e) work, perhaps becoming an entrepeneur living off the name he made for himself amongst fandom; if he remains within the comic book mainstream, even marginally, shifting companies is a good idea-- there is currently very little to be gained by going to DC, but a Colan piece or two at Warren would go over big and probably even prompt a gloating, self-congratulatory editorial. Preiss is another possibility. No job should be held for more than half a year, and may be accompanied by a grim insistence on assuring the writing as well-- the positive reaction of the fans will be roughly proportional to the putridity of the writing, possibly because it makes the art look good.

Then, at the peak of his career, Colan should haughtily stride out of the comic book scene, only reappearing in contentious reviews printed in fanzines to denigrate those artists still plugging away within the restrictions of the industry, or popping up at conventions (by now, as the Guest of Honor) to promote his own half-cocked, hideously expensive ventures with considerable smugness. The applause will rise to a piercing crescendo, and his place among the Greats will be assured.

Until then... I mean, 34 pages a month (plus covers)! Who can respect a guy like that?

THE TIME OF DAY--A LAZY AFTERNOON, LONG AND LUXURIOUS. SUNSHINE DAPPLED SKIES BREATHE SIGHS OF *RELIEF* OVER LAND AND OVER *OCEAN* REFLECTING THE QUIETUDE LIKE *MIRRORS* IN THE EYES OF *BEHOLDERS*.

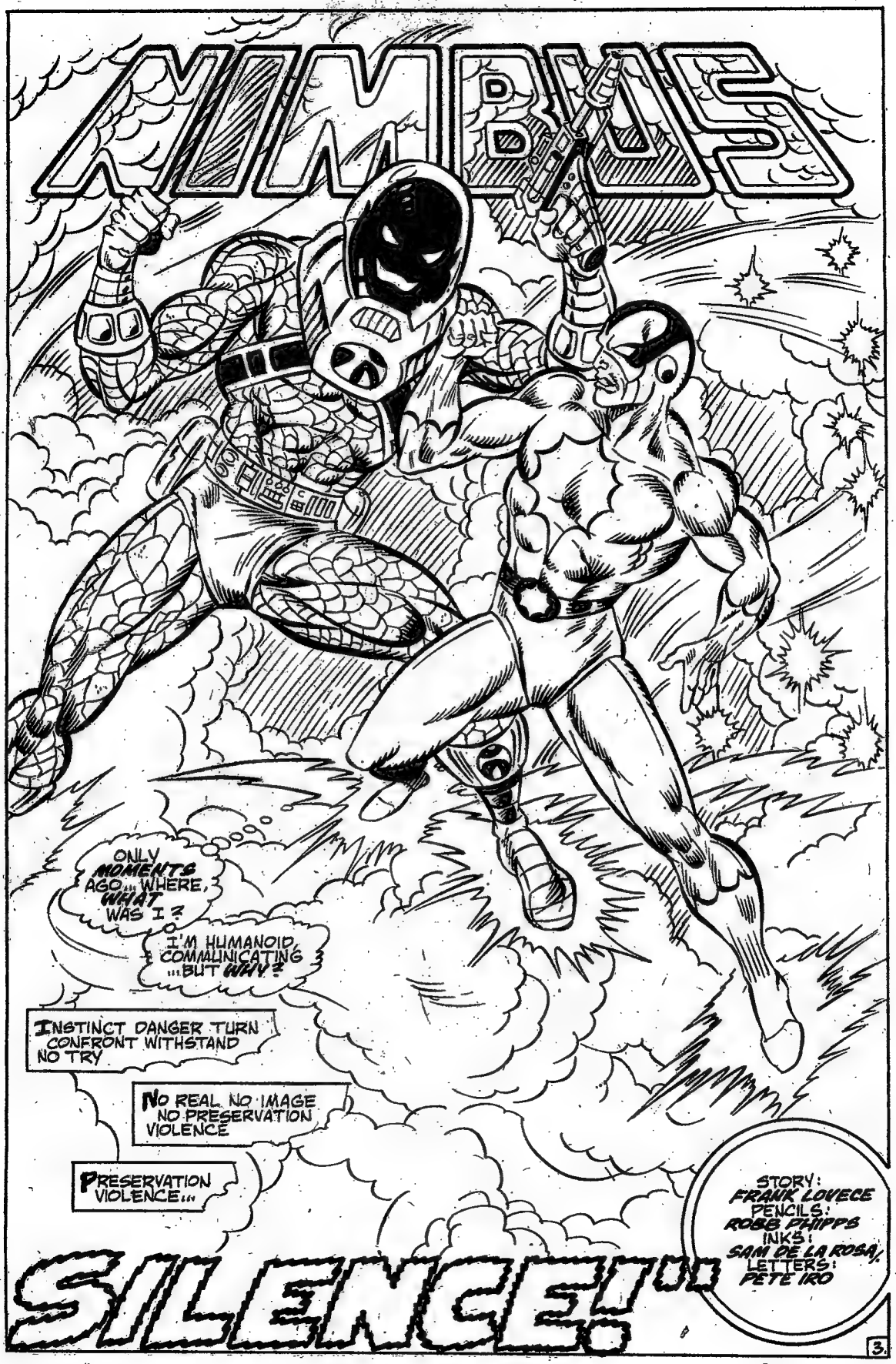
EVEN ON THE U.S. AIR FORCE BASE AT *CHARITY ISLAND* IN THE PACIFIC. THE *PILOTS* CREW AND SOLDIERS *ROAM* THIS SUNDAY AFTERNOON WITH A KNOWING AND EASY *GRACE*.



IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY--

PITY IT HAD TO RAIN.

WHAT D'YA MAKE O' THAT, JAKE?
AWFUL SUDDEN.
YEAH, BETTER ROLL 'EM UP!
..NO...NO IDEA WHAT CAUSED THE STORM... BUT THERE ARE RADIOACTIVE TRACES!
..CHIPPED IT ONTO THE 18TH GREEN. SAY, IS THAT A STORM COMING ON?...
THE CRYSTAL DAY FADES LIKE A FORGOTTEN DREAM.
DEPRESSING. SO MANY THINGS TO DO TODAY.
419
AR
60054
WHY DOES THE RAIN HAVE TO SPOIL THINGS?
EVEN THE CLOUDS ARE DEPRESSING BLACK, ROLLING... BUNCHIN' UP--
--UPON AND AROUND EACH OTHER LIKE FEATHERLY BLOBS OF GUILT.
AND YOU KNOW, YOU COULD SWEAR THERE ARE FIGURES INSIDE...
BROKEN
2.


XMEN
ONLY MOMENTS AGO... WHERE, WHAT WAS I?
I'M HUMANOID, COMMUNICATING ...BUT WHY?
INSTINCT DANGER TURN CONFRONT WITHSTAND NO TRY
NO REAL NO IMAGE NO PRESERVATION VIOLENCE
PRESERVATION VIOLENCE...
SILENCE!!
STORY: FRANK LOVECE
PENCILS: ROBB PHIPPS
INKS: SAM DE LA ROSA
LETTERS: PETE IRO
3.

PRESERVATION!
VIOLENCE!
THE CLOUDS BEGIN TO MURMUR AS THEY SEPARATE, WITNESSES TO A COSMIC SHOOT-OUT. THE OK CORRAL CLEARS, AND IF THERE WILL BE NO HANGINGS FORTHCOMING, IT IS BECAUSE NO ONE IS AT FAULT.
THERE IS ONLY CONFUSION.
4.

...WE DISPATCHED A TEAM IMMEDIATELY. WE DO NEED YOUR AUTHORIZATION BEFORE CONTACTING WASHINGTON.
INCREDIBLE.
I CAN IMAGINE WHAT YOU'RE FEELING. THIS MAY WELL BE OUR FIRST CONTACT WITH EXTRATERRES-TRIALS.
I SEE.
LOOK AT IT, COLONEL. NO WAY WE COULD WHIP THAT UP ON EARTH!
IT'S NOT THE RUSSIANS, INTELLI-GENCE REPORT JUST IN THIS MORNING CITES NO NEW DEVELOPMENTS.
AND THE STORM.
COINCIDENTAL?
WE DON'T THINK SO. THERE WAS SOME RADIATION PRESENT--
--HERE ARE THE SPECS--
--PLUS A HIGH INCIDENCE OF NIMBUS CLOUDS.
NIMBUS?
YEAH!
THERE WAS AN AWFUL LOT OF ELECTRICITY UP THERE.

SHALL I GO AHEAD AND CONTACT WASHINGTON SIR?
IN A MINUTE, CAPTAIN. I'VE GOT A HUNCH TO CHECK OUT FIRST.
YES, SIR. WE DID JUST PICK UP A UFO. HOW DID YOU...?
TWENTY-SIX YEARS IN THE SERVICE, I SUPPOSE. HAVE YOU TRIED TO CONTACT IT?
NO LUCK, SIR.
GIVE IT ONE MORE GO(
THE PEOPLE BELOW... THIS MUST BE THEIR WORLD.
...BUT MINE?
CONFUSED...
...WAS I ONLY CREATED FOR A QUICK, DESTRUCTIVE PURPOSE, ALIVE NOW ONLY TO QUESTION MY EXISTENCE?
BUT YOU DO HAVE A PURPOSE, MY MINION!
6.

NO GOOD DAMMIT! WE HAVE NO IDEA OF WHAT WE'RE TO DEAL WITH.
DON'T STARE AT ME THAT WAY --I KNOW THE UFO IS A POTENTIAL DANGER. AND I KNOW WE'LL REACT WITH VIOLENCE FOR SELF-PRESERVATION. I'M A RATIONAL MAN--AND I SEE NO OTHER CHOICE.
SEND UP A LOW-INTENSITY MISSILE, GO TO YELLOW ALERT!
IF A SITUATION DEVELOPS, WE'LL NOTIFY WASHINGTON, BUT NOT BEFORE.
YOU'RE SITTING ON A POLITICAL POWDER-KEG, SIR--A LOT OF PRESSURE...
IF YOU DON'T FEEL UP TO HANDLING IT, I COULD...
GET THOSE CAMPAIGN POSTERS OUT OF YOUR EYES, CAPTAIN.
YOUR WEST POINT CONNECTIONS MAY HAVE GOTTEN YOU THIS FAR--
--BUT YOU'RE NOT ON THE CABINET YET.
YES, SIR!
LET'S GET STARTED!
7.

THE ATTEMPTS AT COMMUNICATION HAVE FAILED--

--SO THE CREATURE BECOMES THE HUNTED...

...FOR HOWEVER SHORT A TIME.

ADDITIONAL DATA... CHECK...!

CONFIRMATION, THEN?

ROGER. ALPHA AND BETA PARTICLE PRESENCE IN THOSE NIMBUSES. AND THAT'S WHERE THE ENERGY SOURCE ORIGINATED ...A LIVING NIMBUS.

SO THAT'S WHAT IT IS, HUH? JESUS... WE'RE NOT ALONE.

THE LIVING NIMBUS APPROACHES--AND THE PEOPLE BELOW SHARE A VERY COMMON WONDER.

TO BE CONTINUED!

BELOW SURFACES

--A LOOK AT BI-LEVEL COMMUNICATION IN COMICS...

by FRANK LOVECE

It's a pity in this rapidly escalating technocracy of today that there are a lot of people who don't understand the concept of intrapersonal communication to begin with. Certainly, these will be the same people who moan of communication breakdowns, not realizing they are using a meaningless term, or even a lack of communication in the world..., in actuality, the antithesis of the real problem. Thankfully, there are indeed those perceptive souls who understand communication per se in whatever form it ultimately takes, and who realize that a literary equivalent of intrapersonal communication exists in a lot of comics, just as it has existed in so-called "real" writing for times undreamed up. Both artistically and aesthetically, such a realization adds an enjoyable extra level of meaning to comic strips and books-- even if the comics' creators most often don't know that extra level is there.

In way of definition, first of all, communication is the name given to the sending or intended sending of a message from a source to a receiver, and takes into account the factors of feedback, channels, and noise (which is any interruptive element injected into the channels); if you desire a more esoteric framework, a less skeletal definition would include such self-explanatory points as selective attention, selective perception, selective recall, and a few other similar ideas. Intrapersonal refers to a branch of what is called human communication (not exclusive, you know-- computers "talk" to each other, as do dolphins, gypsy moths, humans to animals, ad infinitum), and centers on the notion of any verbal or non-verbal message with intent to inform, persuade, entertain, etc. Finally, bi-level means simply that type of communication which is an interaction rather than a transaction, whioh goes beyond the surface, beyond the cursory "Hi, how are you?" to the often unspoken "I want to know how you are because I care about you, or hate you, or feel I have something in common with you, or whatever." Both in literature and in life, there is also a tri-level of symbolism, intent, and allegory, but that is a most complex and confounding tangent, to be attended to another time.

Before we dissect any of the various strips which have notably employed levels of intrapersonal communication, perhaps an example of what is not meant by that term would be in order. For some reason, the old Lee/Kirby/Ayers RAWHIDE KID stories come to mind, probably because those tales are as good examples as any of uni-level communication done entertainingly and well. Think of it-- Rawhide always engaged in rootin', tootin', down-home action, pausing seldom to ponder the clear-cut, black and white morality Stan Lee gave him. Whatever bi-level communication there ever was usually consisted of Rawhide saying to some girl he'd rescued, "Well, ma'am, guess yore safe now, so I'll be moseyin' along," when he hypothetically meant by his vocal tone, facial gestures, body movements, etc., "Look, I saved your life, and I don't really expect thanks, but I would like to know you better, even if I am only an outlaw, because I'm really just a lonely kid who's good with a gun, and I'd like to know what you think of me," In that example, bearing out the above hypothesis, Lee's final panel for that type of story would always leave Rawhide thinking, "I wanted to stay, but I'm just a no'count outlaw; I'm not good enough fer a pretty girl like her. C'mon, Nightwind--" while the girl would sigh, "He was so exciting, and handsome! But I know a simple girl like me couldn't possibly win the heart of... THE RAWHIDE KID!"

And like that.

Obviously, you could conceivably reason, today's comics, with all their sophistication and storytelling techniques and involved characterizations, will regularly utilize bi-level communication (that is to say in this context, real, consequential messages of importance, and possi-

ble change). Unfortunately, and equally obviously, that is sadly not the case. Too many times today's comics will have token characterizations, and artificial plot advancements, with the sum effect being a construction of a mere fascade of bi-level communication. The commercial aspects of the comic book medium limit true advancement and growth, real intrapersonal overtones, but the few comics that do utilize those self-same things are also the ones recognized as having some degree of literary/artistic note. Despite research into the whole comics-as-art field, comic books often fail as art, be they products of our commercial art period or whatever, because they don't first fulfill the requirements of an artistic mode, in this case literature: they must work within the prior requirements of an "action-action-action-for-the kiddies-kiddies-kiddies" framework. It is only when that bi-level aspect surfaces occasionally -- possible with both script or art-- and uses the need for action/adventure to a turnabout advantage, that the idea of art in a comic book comes about.

What is interesting to note here is that comic strips, from whence comic books did originally emerge, are less tied-down to those afore-mentioned action/adventure requirements, and can, especially in the use of comedy for ironic effect, more freely persue art. Walt Kelly's POGO and Charles Schulz's PEANUTS are examples of this in modern times as surely as Daumier was an eponymous example in eighteenth-century France. Each utilizes both bi- and tri-level meanings in their statements and contexts. Dramatic comic strips of artistic value subsequently use high adventure by choice and to make a point, and a roster of such strips can easily include Milton Caniff's STEVE CANYON and Hal Foster's PRINCE VALIANT, to name just a couple. In the newspaper format, after all, the strips don't have to sell themselves in and of themselves, and usually are allowed a moderately long time to develop, to grow artistically. Can one expect to have found a Herriman or Trudeau in the more commercially oriented field of comic books? Probably not, if a completely negative answer here is going too far. Comic books, though, do have a few unique personality traits peculiar to themselves alone, and it can be shown how certain comics have, using those levels of meaning we've discussed, acheived some degree of artistic note.

Precisely, then, we can begin to exemplify our statements. A look at the defunct Charlton title, E-MAN, because of the book's short span and other intrinsic factors, should serve well, for E-MAN was indeed very clever, but was it art?

(Let us clarify, first of all, the fact that said comic was a personal favorite of the author and that he and Nick Cuti produced an article on E-Man for NIMBUS #2.) As one examines the chronology of the particular comic's run-- unfortunately, the author hasn't seen the CHARLTON BULLSEYE stories, though they are part of a different genre, the magazine-- one can see what appears to be a quite overt change in Nova Kane, when she changed into an energy-creature not unlike E-Man. Yet, in the stories both preceding and after the change, all those tales of Nova expressing the heroine's infatuation and concern for Alec Tronn/E-Man, we never once got to go below the surface of her words and actions and outermost thoughts, and find anything more than a single, outward, uni-level meaning: a less-than-face-value situation was extant. If we had been allowed to enter Nova's or Alec's heads we would have been able to derive more significance from their words, actions, and thoughts, which in turn would have developed the characters' personalities, in time, as complete individuals. Thus, for example, when Nova once made the offhand thought-remark, "Love that guy!" we would have known, given the context of surrounding circumstances, whether her words were idle, passionate, in-passing, concerned, maternal, affectionate, romantic, or whatever-- subtly shifting nuances in search of true meaning. No bi-level meanings ever came about, though, and subsequently, no related plot advancement of any consequence was ever made.

All told, however, E-MAN was a lot of fun to read. Conversely, such a statement does not imply that an artistic Starlin WARLOCK, or McGregor/Russell WAR OF THE WORLDS, or Moench/Gulacy MASTER OF KUNG-FU might be any less fun to read simply because they (as examples) utilize those elusive extra levels of meaning. Such an assumption would entail mutual exclusiveness between artistic/intellectual value, and pure entertainment value. Is Handel's "Messiah" any less entertaining than the Eagles' "One of These Night Nights?" Would even Hunter's Sons or The Blackboard Jungle be any less entertaining than one of Ed McBain's 87th Precinct books? Would Eugene O'Neill be any less entertaining than Graucho Marx? To a moderately complete person, the answer would have to be no, demonstrating clearly, that art can be fun, and that there is room in every medium, including comic books, for entertainment values at an artistic/intellectual level.

After all, comparing Howard the Duck to Daffy Duck would be ludicrous, for Howard involves himself in at least two levels of meaning-- though Donald Duck, after all, does the same thing through Carl Barks' art, so you never can be too sure!

It was a long, stunted childhood, but it's over.

The childhood to which I refer is that of National Periodicals. I chose to mention it because evidence has it that DC has at least come up to the level of an adolescent interest in the matter of sex.

To begin from the beginning: one reason adults have always scorned superhero comics is their pre-occupation with super-men and -women with no sexual element. The lack has been a central force for all manner of underground satires, and few companies in the '40's had perfected the sexless image so well as National, despite the occasional perversities of WONDER WOMAN.

Skipping to the '50's, we see that DC remained conservative all the way, in spite of less inhibited competitors. But fortune favored them (incredible luck) with the Comics Code, eliminating all those lewd corporations-- EC, Quality, etc.

Now when I say their image was sexless, that has to be qualified. Of course all the heroes more or less had girlfriends, and could get involved in humorous romances. But these were purely devices on which to turn plotlines. If not for Marvel's competition, DC might have stayed in infancy for much longer.

Now when Marvel came, the hand of the Code was still heavy. Sexy comics were still out, and it's unlikely that Lee would have favored such himself, observing his usually-demure female characterizations. Lee did provide a greater sexual outlet for his characters, however, by incorporating the standard romantic agonies of love-magazines. DC's reaction to the whole business was largely conservative-- sexual relations were still for the purpose of giving the hero a helpmate, a helpless hanger-on, or a humor-element. Competition did produce some disparate types-- Platinum of the METAL MEN, a robot woman in love with a human scientist, and unquestionably the most erotic of the bunch; Sapphire Stagg, the rather unbelievable but refreshing love of METAMORPHO; and Elasti-Girl, the most autonomous female produced by DC, and a prime moving force of the DOOM PATROL.

But of them all, the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES had quantitatively more romances going for it than any other. Most of the relationships are unadorned boy/girl entwinements, but we had only to to wait for the '70's, when the dynamics of romance and who-loves-who would get even more complex even as costumes got more revealing. Karate Kid, getting his own book as a response to the kung-fu craze, excited readers by having both a future girl-friend and a modern-day one as well! DC's first time-hopping hero-philanderer!

For this is the modern response of DC to the reverberations of the sexual revolution: more realization of sensuality, accompanied by adolescent giggles. BATMAN FAMILY scored when Batgirl smooched Robin, started a wave of controversy about age discrepancies, and even paved the way for a self-satirizing "marriage" of the Batman-offspring. Near SUPERMAN's 300th issue, the perennial dullards, Clark and Lois, began to make noises-- and motions-- like adult lovers. METAL MEN, upon revival, undertook to temporarily give Tina a Mae West persona, in which she turned on to all the robots but not her former "beloved." Female characters became especially important to such mags as ALL-STAR, FREEDOM FIGHTERS, KOBRA, and SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS-- and even THE JOKER fell in love.

Yet somehow the main character to get left out became the least appropriate. This is WONDER WOMAN. At her evolution she mirrored a change in sexual awareness; during her heyday she may have justifiably been accused of sexual perversions. DC cleaned her up, but in the late '60's Denny O'Neil undertook to rennovate her, some claim, based on Emma Peel of THE AVENGERS. Yet the change was then for the better, for O'Neil was faithful to the character, whatever his other contrivances. Briefly, Diana Prince emerged as a human being, complete with a sexual nature never quite as restrained as Mrs. Peel's.

Then, the company took its "progressive step backwards," as they called it, and WONDER WOMAN was back to being a safe, unemotional heroine. The tendency has not lessened with the TV exposure, and someday, it will be interesting to look back and wonder what Charles Moulton would have made of the whole business. By then, too, we should know whether National eventually grew up, or whether, as seems likely now, it drowned in pubescence and never came up for air.

PETE'S PODIUM

One reasonably frequent argument I run into every so often in fan-circles is the one dealing with the relative importance between the art and the story. It usually is resolved by the artistically inclined of the group declaring the art the more important of the two, and the writers equally adamant about the relative position of their bias.

I'm repeating the argument perhaps a bit simplistically, and apologies for it, but it is to make a point. The most important facet of the comics medium, as with any other medium, more important than either its drawing or writing, is communication. One can dazzle with flourishes of (seemingly) unending technique, but if it serves no purpose, it becomes, merely, a(n) (sometimes) interesting, but basically meaningless exercise.

In the oft-confused (and confusing) world of comics, such generalizations as expressed by certain fans miss the mark by the proverbial kilometer, as it shows a lack of understanding of the medium, as such, on their part.

Confusing on the one hand because of the mechanics and dynamics of production, commercial or otherwise, and confusing on the other hand because of the medium's strong relationships to the other media with which it often becomes compared, in particular film, tending to cloud the issue and one usually winds up evaluating the comics medium in a totally comparative context anyway.

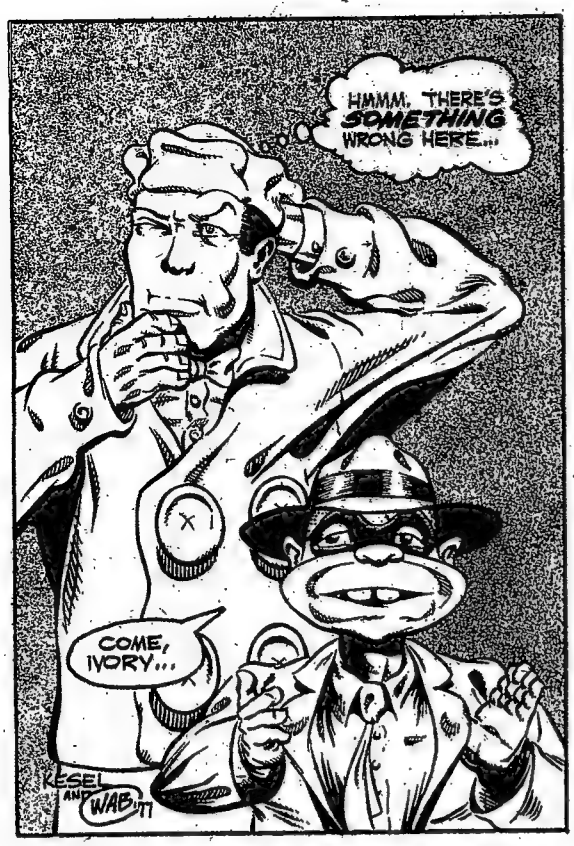
With varying company policies, and the gamut of the individual idiosyncracies of the writers, artists and editors, the role of the real "artist" of the medium, the one who "speaks", as it were, through it is often a tough puzzle to unravel. On the one hand you have an artist who merely illustrates, panel-by-panel, the script before him. Wayne Boring, for instance, claimed in an interview that it wasn't his habit to read any story he was assigned. He'd draw it, one panel at a time, discovering the story as it unfolded before him on his drawing board. The opposite extremes would be artists like Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby who would virtually create the whole story around the most basic of plot outlines.

One fact we all agree on is that comics are a visual medium first and foremost, with its own idioms and disciplines. It is this facet that makes the comics medium unique, distinguishable from all others. Without the visual element comics would simply not exist. Conversely, illustrations without context and sequence would merely be illustrations. It is in the fusion of separate elements, story and picture, that the new medium emerges. Like any growing and maturing organism, this medium went through varying stages of dependancy on its parent media, but in the maturing process its characteristics, idiosyncracies and language have become its own, independent from, yet continuous and contiguous from its parent and cousin media. One example for instance, would be the suspension of "real" time, time being for the most part dependent on the reader, and the resulting subjective manipulation thereof to acheive greater clarity and/or effect which in other visually oriented media would be impossible without distorting the objective reality of time itself. Another example is the interaction between the written and the visual levels, which are more than just two parallel narratives, but rather the two resulting in a third form that is more than the sum of its cumulative origins because it can communicate nuances the other two can't.

The artists, writers and editors are, believe it or not, people, with varying temperaments and personalities which affect the interaction between them in the creative processes as well as giving unique dimensions to the work of each such individual. Thus, the demands on one's psyche from without, and within, become a significant factor in the success of the given product. Simply, some people are more into westerns than, for instance, cosmic allegories-- John Severin as opposed to Phillippe Druillet-- or a little less simply, are more comfortable in dealing with subject matter to which they more readily relate as individuals.

Some writers fiercely guard the actualization of their visions while some artists are in the business only because they enjoy drawing. With factors so varied affecting the mode and mood of creating the finished product, what emerges is the idea thar what is important in/to the medium is the individual who bears most directly upon the finished product, the one who in essence controls and defines.

The artist who bears most directly on the finished strip is, it turns out, the most important to the success of the strip. Whether it is the individual who draws the strip which he conceived in the first place-- for instance a Jim Starlin who might have had someone else script for him as on CAPTAIN MARVEL-- or the individual who, while not doing the actual drawing, is the moving, creative spirit behind a strip, such as is Steve Gerber with HOWARD THE DUCK, or Don McGregor with the BLACK PANTHER... or in times past, Will Eisner on THE SPIRIT.



In all four cases what emerges is the existance of an individual motivating direction, an identity dominating the creative processes, hopefully, for their sake, and our benefit, paired with compatible, sympathetic psyches: all four communicating their ideas, for our instruction/diversion/entertainment/whatever. In neither case can one really talk of the "artist" or "writer" being the more important, at least not in the original context. What we've come to is the individual who successfully manipulates this medium for expression/communication, in other words, the true artist (and as one will note, as of the previous paragraph, the quotation marks have been dropped when used in this context and have been tacked on when, as initially used, referring to the penciller/inker in the popular usage). Of course, the relative success of the artist is proportionate with the success in manipulating the medium for said instruction/diversion/entertainment/whatever.

Of course, there are the instances where the creative process is split on more egalitarian bases, but in such cases we'd have to deal with not "artist" vs. "writer," but with the cumulative, artificial identity that is the sum of those parts of said individuals' collaborative, creative processes that affect the strip. Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy on MASTER OF KUNG-FU come to mind as frequently falling into this category.

The conclusion we've arrived at is not that the "artist" or "writer" is more important. Instead, the individual artist, be he/she the one who writes, or the one who draws, that exercises the most direct influence in the story-telling, in the communication of the idea/story, is the more important. Editors can even come to mind here, people who have the job of taking on the creative personalities and maximizing their contributions by understanding, hopefully, the creators and their work and/or being the springboard for their work as in the case of Stan Lee in the '60's for a large part of the Marvel line, and to a lesser degree, over at DC, Julius Schwartz on occasion.

So far we've dealt specifically with the "artists" and "writers," not the art and story, the finished product, as stated in the first paragraph.

As we've come to see the importance/influence of the individuals upon the creating of a strip, so too, the art and/or story succeeds when one part enhances and compliments the other part, with the one doing the more enhancing and complementing being the more important in the instance where the creative influence is the least pronounced on the part of the other individual and reversed, until the two meet in the mid-ground of a mutually-balanced collaboration. Examples, consecutively: Neal Adams illustrating a weak story and enhancing it by adding subtleties, nuances, perhaps forgone (or ignored) by the author, in his graphics, not to mention his dynamics in general; Gene Colan in relationship to Steve Gerber on HOWARD THE DUCK; and last, the above mentioned Gulacy/Moench collaboration on MASTER OF KUNG-FU (or perhaps, for the sake of a different example, McGregor and Russell on KILLRAVEN, though perhaps not as "equally" as Moench and Gulacy).

We agreed earlier on above that comics are first and foremost a visual medium, and I personally am disposed of the notion that by-and-large (excepting for the most part the top titles) good art in books with mediocre stories will outsell books with mediocre art and a somewhat better story. I must also qualify my use of "good" by explaining I mean clean, effective artwork. Artwork, that, frills or no frills, will clearly convey the needed emotions and situations with minimum confusion. I believe it was Steranko who said that if the artist has to use arrows to point out what's going on that that artist is not doing his job. Certainly, a bad story will be considerably "punched up," by say, Gil Kane by virtue of his strong dynamics; the interest on the part of the casual/reader/purchaser will be piqued a wee bit more. He/she might not know beans about good art, but a more

exciting drawing is a more exciting drawing none-the-less. Of course, if it were another story, a touch more exciting, regardless of the artists, the value of the idea might just carry the more weight. My theory doesn't go far if it isn't understood that in both of the above cases I refer to the same general product, in each case with two possible packagings. In one case, a mediocre story could be glossed up with strong art; in the other case, mediocre art will not necessarily detract from a strong idea. Of course, one does hope for the marriage of good story and good art to take place as often as possible, as in always, but...

I must also explain that to some degree by "good" I'm referring to that quality which is (often) a compromise between the commercial needs of a financially succeccful product and imaginative/esthetic qualites.

Many fans bemoan the fact that the X-MEN, or GREEN LANTERN (this is an equal-opportunity article) by Neal Adams and Messrs. Thomas and O'-Neil had excellent artwork and story, yet folded. My response to that would be that they failed because they weren't "good." Not on the basis of our fannish tastes, nor to those of us who saw Art in them, but because in each case they were dying books to begin with. On the other hand, they probably weren't commercially viable ideas/products at the time, i.e. "good."

As a side note one could conceivably assume that the readership wasn't as sophisticated, "comics-wise," some years ago as perhaps today. I, for one, have met people who didn't think much of Adams' art, considering it overdone, clutterd and pretentious in which instances the art to them certainly couldn't have been "good." Besides which GREEN LANTERN had the tendency to bludgeon you over the head with its "relevancy."

I'm not equating quality with the commercial advantages of certain factors; I do believe, however, that, through exploration and experimentation, a broader overlap in the ranges of the two will emerge. Lord knows, it would bring a tear or two of joy to the eye of a few fans and a certain pro or three.

Another factor to consider is the audience the strip/book is intended for. Supposedly, it's directed all at the mythical 13-year-old (11-year-old, if you're company-conscious), yet in spite of this pre-ordained commercial directive, many pros would like to do something that is directed at not only this statistical audience but in a more adult/eclectic/generally creative direction. KILLRAVEN wasn't necessarily aimed for the same audience as PETER PARKER, ANOTHER GODDAMN SPIDEY TITLE. One has to take into consideration the motives and goals of the creative parties-- and much to the distaste of most fans, the business interests-- before formulating an opinion, an opinion which will wind up being multi-level, multi-directional, and above all personal, as it has to be in relation to one's own personal tastes/biases.

Still, one mustn't leave objectivity behind and judge totally on personal bias alone, as many things deal with circumstances and situations that have to be judged on their own merits.

Above all this, what is the most important is what you like, and what you don't like. All of which brings us back to my first point, communication. Communication. The ability to meaningfully express one's self, to put across ideas and feelings effectively. This then is the indication of possible Art in the comics medium, approached, or maybe even acheived when it successfully gets across an idea, a feeling that affects the reader in more than a superficial manner. This then, too, is the indication of possible artistry on the part of either a single individual, perhaps utilizing the talents of other skilled individuals in nurturing into actuality his/her vision(s), or the artificial entity that is the cumulative, collective, creative identity of a grouping of individuals working towards a mutual goal of expression. Getting something across to you the reader, effectively, for your entertainment/diversion/intellectual stimulation/whatever. Keep that in mind.

VICTORY
AFTER RESCUING THE TRIARK FROM HIS PRISON IN UNDERWATER ATLANTIS, VIC WAS FORCED TO DO BATTLE WITH THE MADDENED KING OF GALBAROK. THEIR BATTLE MOVED INTO THE SKIES, WHERE THE TRIARK SUDDENLY WENT LIMP AND FELL TOWARD A TINY ISLAND. AMAZINGLY, HIS BODY DISAPPEARED AS IT NEARED THE GROUND. UNABLE TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY FROM THE AIR, VIC FLIES CLOSER TO LEARN...
"THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND!"
WAB '77

VIC CONTINUES TO SCAN THE ISLAND FOR CLUES. AND THEN, HE REMEMBERS...

THIS ISLAND! IT'S SO CLOSE TO ATLANTIS, AND IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FROM IT--THIS HAS TO BE MT. AATLA!

THIS WAS THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE OF NEPTUUN, THE PATRON-GOD OF THE CITY! WHAT WAS IT I HEARD ABOUT...

KZYZYASKI

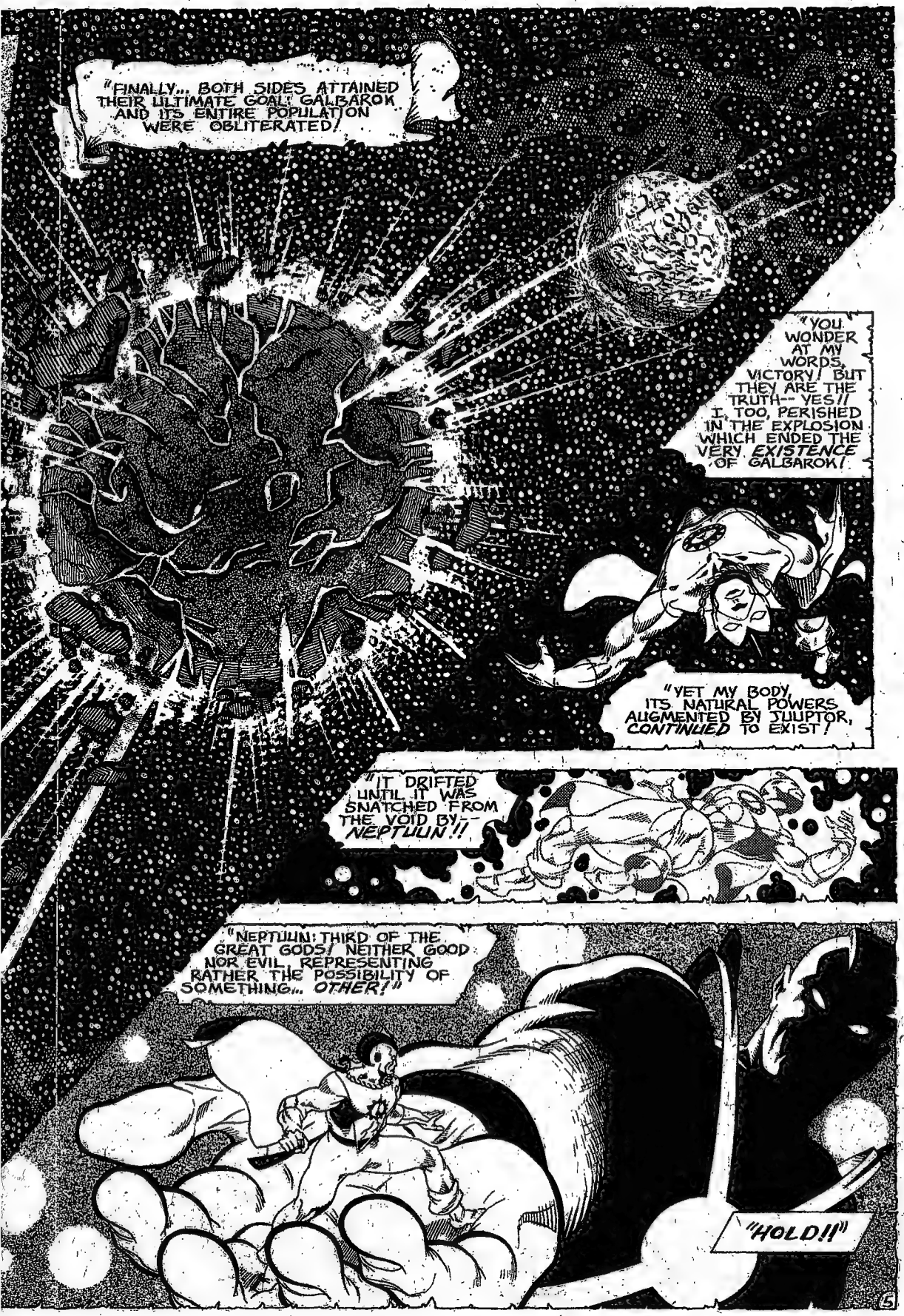
UNHH! THAT BLAST--LEFT ME GROGGY! AND I'M FALLING TOWARD AATLA!

BY JUUPTOR!!

I'M... BEGINNING TO--

--DISAPPEAR!
MATERIALIZING SUDDENLY, VIC FINDS HIMSELF STILL FALLING! AND BEFORE HE CAN CHANGE DIRECTION...
SPAM!
BUT A FALL OF SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET DOESN'T STOP VIC FOR LONG, AND HE RISES TO SEE...
YOU!!
WELCOME TO AATLA!
YOU'RE THE TRIARK!
BUT... THIS CAN'T BE AATLA — THE ISLAND WAS EMPTY!
THIS IS AATLA, BUT A FAR DIFFERENT ONE THAN THE ISLAND, OR THE MOUNTAIN IT HAD BEEN!
MT. AATLA WAS ORIGINALLY THE HOME OF THE PRIESTS OF NEPTUUN! THEIR SECRET WAS JUST ABOVE THE PEAK-- A DOORWAY TO ANOTHER DIMENSION!!
THIS OTHER REALITY WAS THE REFUGE OF THE GREAT GOD! IT WAS THERE HE BUILT THE NEW AATLA, WHERE WE NOW STAND!
BUT--WHY?! WHY DID YOU ATTACK ME BEFORE? AND WHY WERE YOU ENTOMBED IN ATLANTIS? WHAT'S BEHIND ALL THIS?
I WAS CONFUSED BEFORE--I'D BEEN LOCKED IN THAT CELL, SEMI-CONSCIOUS, FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS!
I ASSURE YOU--I'VE REGAINED MY SENSES, AND YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME!
TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION, I MUST TELL YOU OF MY ORIGIN-- AND OF GALBAROR!
3

GAL-BAROK: A WORLD WHICH NO LONGER EXISTS!!
"... A WORLD GOVERNED BY THREE KINGS, KNOWN AS THE TRIARKS/ I WAS ONE OF THE THREE, AND AS THE PRODUCT OF COUNTLESS CENTURIES OF GENETIC CONTROL, WAS BORN WITH SUPER NORMAL POWERS!
"AS ANY BEING, I HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL... MY CHOICE WAS GOOD! I WAS THE NATURAL CHOICE IN TURN OF THE GREAT GOD JUUPTOR, TO BE CHIEF AMONG HIS AGENTS UPON GALBAROK!
"YES - LIKE YOURSELF, I FOUGHT THE FORCES OF JUUPTOR'S ENEMY — THE GREAT GOD OF EVIL, MAARZ!!
"THE WAR BETWEEN THE GREAT GODS CONSUMED MY WORLD, UNTIL EVERY SENTIENT BEING LIVED ONLY TO DESTROY THE OPPOSING GROUP!


"FINALLY... BOTH SIDES ATTAINED THEIR ULTIMATE GOAL! GALBAROK AND ITS ENTIRE POPULATION WERE OBLITERATED!
"YOU WONDER AT MY WORDS, VICTORY! BUT THEY ARE THE TRUTH-- YES!! I, TOO, PERISHED IN THE EXPLOSION WHICH ENDED THE VERY EXISTENCE OF GALBAROK!
"YET MY BODY, ITS NATURAL POWERS AUGMENTED BY JUUPTOR, CONTINUED TO EXIST!
"IT DRIFTED UNTIL IT WAS SNATCHED FROM THE VOID BY-- NEPTUUN!!
"NEPTUUN: THIRD OF THE GREAT GODS! NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL, REPRESENTING RATHER THE POSSIBILITY OF SOMETHING... OTHER!"
"HOLD!!"

WHAT?!
AM I TO BELIEVE I'VE BEEN LISTENING TO A CORPSE? OR PERHAPS YOU'RE A GHOST?
LISTEN!! I WANT ANSWERS, AND I WANT THEM NOW!
ZZZZZZAP!!
DON'T WASTE ANY MORE TIME LYING TO ME ABOUT JUUPTOR! WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME? NOW RISE AND SPEAK!
I'LL RISE...
TO DO THIS!
6

AS THE TRIARK FLIES AWAY...
SO FAR, SO GOOD! I HAD TO LISTEN TO HIM WHILE MY SENSES ADJUSTED TO THE REALITIES OF THIS... REALITY!
NOW, IF I HAVE THE ADVANTAGE I THINK I HAVE IN FLIGHT, MY GOADING HIM INTO THE AIR SHOULD PAY OFF...!
I WONDER IF THERE'S ANY TRUTH TO HIS STORY... IT IS STRANGE THAT JUUPTOR ALLOWED ME TO DRIFT IN SPACE ALL THAT TIME! AND THERE'S STILL BEEN NO ATTEMPT TO CONTACT ME!
BUT IF JUUPTOR AND MAARZ ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF ENTIRE WORLDS... THE IMPLICATIONS ARE STAGGERING!
THE GREAT GODS' STRUGGLES IN THE PAST WERE FOR THE SOUL!
IF THEY HAVE CHANGED THIS TO WHERE THEY SEEK ACTUAL PHYSICAL CONTROL OF BEINGS, IT WOULD MEAN ALL-OUT COSMIC WARFARE!
AND THAT COULD LEAD TO THE ULTIMATE ANNIHILATION OF THE UNIVERSE!
WHY WOULD THE GODS TAKE SUCH A CHANCE? IT WOULD MEAN THEIR END TOO!
MY ONLY WAY OF FINDING ANSWERS IS TO FORCE THEM FROM THE TRIARK!
SO I BETTER CATCH...
WAIT! THAT SHAPE-- MATERIALIZING! IT'S...

"NEPTUUN!!"
VICTORY! YOUR QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE IS OVER! I REVEAL THESE TRUTHS:
IT WAS NOT AN "ELECTRICAL STORM," BUT THE POWER OF JUUPTOR WHICH LEFT YOU HELPLESS IN DEEP SPACE!
THUS DID THE GODS OF GOOD AND EVIL SEEK TO DESTROY ALL THEIR SERVANTS!
IN BUT ONE CASE DID THEY ERR! IN BUT ONE CASE WAS THERE A SURVIVOR! YOU!!
I KNOW ALSO THAT IT WAS I WHO AWAKENED YOU; WHO LED YOU TO ATLANTIS TO RESCUE KORAN KHORUM, THE TRIARK OF GALBAROK!
AS YOU HYPOTHESIZED, THE ACTIONS OF JUUPTOR AND MAARZ MAY RESULT IN COSMIC OBLIVION!
THE UNIVERSE HAS NEED OF YOU, VICTORY!
NEED OF A WARRIOR TO FIGHT FOR EXISTENCE ITSELF!
...TO BE CONTINUED?

LETTERS TO WOWEE!

Before getting into this lettercol, I'd like to thank everyone who took out the time to drop us a line. Thanks, people. We appreciate it.

Dear Dean,

I've been getting into fanzines of late and find WOWEE to be at the top of the heap. The front and back covers were sights to behold. This issue was so good in fact, I decided to subscribe. What I liked about this zine was that space wasn't wasted. Willie's strip, VICTORY, is tremendous. And every single article was of interest to me. I also noticed the lack of ads: another plus! And the interview with Don McGregor was both enlightening and... dissettling.

Ruben Toyos

(Thanks, Ruben. And hey, it was nice meeting you at Creation!)

Dear Dean,

First off, your overall quality amazes me. Rodi's article on Storm was an excellent psychological study. Her relatively few appearances (albeit through Chris Claremont's characterizations) would make Storm difficult to analyze, but Bob handled the job well. I got the impression he had fallen in love with the lass, so I guess there's empathy involved.

Don McGregor, as always, is interesting, funny, pathetic, charming, eloquent, and engaging. So was the interview. A touch more artwork, particularly of Don and Craig's villains (highly visual chaps) would have been nice. Pacella shows promise, Iro's spot was good, Gruenwald's pieces were incredible, but Schindler's, while interesting, was off-base and defeatist-- to all of his fans and followers, KR will continue to live. He's gone, at least for the moment, but I'll be damned if we have some funeral service for him.

Now Pete Iro's article-- excellent! Is there anything that guy can't do? His psychoanalytic survey of the Marvel mystique and segue into the parallels of Kirby were handled clearly, articulately, and with a blending of nostalgia, criticism, unclouded by emotionality. I would have stated the purpose of the article at the start, though-- my criticism of the article is basically that it appears to have begun as one article, and halfway through he changed his mind.

Kim's review of Gruenwald's TORICL was so concise and responsibly handled (no small deal when reviewing a peerless abstraction). I've already ordered my copy of TORICL.

Finally, Blyberg's cover shows him to be a potentially fine artist with style and a penchant for detail. If he could only get his anatomy together-- as is, the Black Panther looked like an erstwhile sidekick of Magneto's. But it was beautiful overall, and the logo was very slick. Iro's back cover was a nice compliment to the front. All in all, a hell of a fanzine.

Frank Lovece

(My good friend Frank can always be counted on for some interesting comments. For those interested in sampling Frank's own, excellent zine, NIMBUS, send $1.50 to Sam de la Rosa (publisher of the ish) at: 328 Canavan, San Antonio, Texas 78221.)

Dear Dean,

To start off with, the cover was very good. You people have had a two-issue trend of very good covers and fantastic back covers. My compliments.

The Don McGregor interview was the highlight of the issue for me. It showed an aspect of the Bullpen which is frankly, frightening. All of a sudden, the thought of all those loonies in control of my favorite characters blasted me.

I was disappointed in not seeing the second installment of SQUEEZBOX SERENADE. I had been led to believe that it would be a regular feature. I loved the first installment, and hope that it isn't gone for good.

OF KINGS, KINGMAKERS, AND PRETENDERS TO THE THRONE was beautiful. Pete Iro's views on Kirby coincide with mine almost to a "t." The illustrations were beautiful, too.

Jo Duffy's article was absolutely beautiful, to the point, and surprisingly on a delicate subject such as this, I found myself disagreeing with her only once (re: Valkyrie).

Finally, I'll just say that I think VICTORY deserves a regular spot in WOWEE, and that if the next issue is the finale, it can't wrap the story ry up nicely enough in six pages.

Kurt Busiek

(We're glad you liked the issue, Kurt. As you'll notice, VICTORY continues on as a regular feature of the book.)

Dear Dean,

Basically, you've got a good zine here. Its only weakness is some of the shorter, overly fannish pieces. STORM was an exception, but there's far too little meat in story rehashes like CLASSIC CONFRONTATIONS.

K. J. Robbins admirably manages to fulfill both functions of giving information and criticism in a shortened form. Pete Iro's article wasn't quite unified, but still provided a good examination of Kirby.

Gene Phillips

(Thanks, Gene. I'm sure you've all noticed by now, Gene has become a contributor to WOWEE. We hope you enjoy his work as much as we do.)

Dear Dean,

Just at a time a lot of folks are mourning the demise of the Era of the Real, Honest-to-gosh fanzine, along comes this little masterpiece,

interesting, well-written, knowledgable and nicely packaged.

I'm especially glad you presented a CONVERSATION WITH DON MCGREGOR. Now let it be known that I'm no admirer of McGregor's work-- and that the interview did nothing to change my opinion of his writing other than to broaden and confirm some of my perceptions of how he approaches his work. It's evident that he's anything but a hack writer, that the care and feeling he lavishes on his strips and characters mean a great deal to him and his many fans. But along the way, McGregor seems to have lost track of the notion that, generally speaking, the comic medium is foremost an entertainment medium. Yet nowhere in the interview do I recall seeing him pay so much as lip service to that notion. Given the strength of his convictions, it's to his credit that he didn't cave in under the pressures of office politics and commercial imperatives, do an about-face and begin manufacturing the easy-to-write, mindless drivel that some comic writers are content to turn out. But it should have dawned on him long ago that there's no solid niche for his brand of self-indulgence at Marvel. My fannish inclinations go in another direction than his, and it's for that reason that I've never particularly enjoyed McGregor's stories.

Kim Thompson's review of Mark Gruenwald's TORICL was short and to the point. I would have preferred to see a closer exploration and analysis of some of TORICL's premises and arguments. As long as Kim's review opens up wider audiences for TORICL, it's well worth the space you gave it. The industy's lack of respect for comic heroines has been bemoaned by so many fans in so many contexts and forums that Jo Duffy's article on the subject was well-nigh superfluous. Instead of taking an overview approach, Jo might better have examined a few specific cases in depth. At one point she mentions the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES. It strikes me that if she were to become familiar with the strip she'd have some of the material she needs in order to shed some new light on the issue. Long before women's awareness took hold, going back now to the early and mid-60's, the LEGION was the only consistantly, un-self-consciously non-sexist book on the stands. I'll leave that blanket statement for her to verify...

All in all, WOWEE #2 was a remarkable zine. here's to many, many more.

Harry Broertjes

(As most of you are, I'm sure, aware, Harry and his LEGION OUTPOST are well known throughout fankind. For those interested in the Legion, the OUTPOST's address is 566 20th Street, Apt. 9, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33305.)

Dear Dean,

I had to write and comment on WOWEE #2. It was every bit as good, probably better in fact, as the first issue.

The McGregor interview was really, really nice. Thanks also for the checklist. I'm already closing in on some of Don's older works, which for the most part, I was totally unaware of. Especially nice artwork accompanying the interview.

Kim Thompson's TORICL review was fine, as I'm sure Gruenwald's TREATISE is. I've already ordered my copy as a result of the review.

Willie's VICTORY has so much going for it-- it's just great! Incredible, in fact. There's so much going on here that the story could have become chaos, yet the storyline is holding up nicely. Nice work on the layouts, too.

An outstanding piece of fan work. Take a bow.

Pete Gallo

(Thanks, Pete. Like everyone else, I am enthralled with VICTORY as well.)

Dear Dean,

WOWEE #2 is as good a zine of its kind as ever I've had the fortune to enjoy. The contributors, both the artists and the writers, must all be sincere, concerned comic book fans, for such quality art and articles do not develop without both enthusiasm and much work.

First, the Blyberg cover of T'Challa captured superbly the special feeling that Billy Graham gave his issues of JUNGLE ACTION. Too, a nifty inside front cover of the Iron Fist principles by a couple of fan dependables nicely complemented the contents page. Imagine, just two pages passed, and already I'm pleased by a variety of quality art.

Bob Rodi's article on STORM set the high standard of writing for the issue. The piece was concise, very well thought out, and smoothly written, and on a wonderful topic. Bob made me realize how truly unique a character Storm is. I never gave much thought to the idea of Storm as both "goddess" and "Earth-Mother" and how this duality affects her powers and authority, and most important, her need to know herself.

The highlight of the issue was the Don McGregor interview. The interview had a sad quality to it. I regret now, more than when it occurred, Don's departure from Marvel. Of particular interest was his collection of comments on working conditions in the Bullpen, with all the difficulty he had on LUKE CAGE as an example. As much as I am a Marvel fan, I feel the gang there did pretty poorly by Don McGregor. Also, thanks for the McGregor checklist. It was nicely laid out, and a welcome feature.

Pete Iro's writing about Kirby left me a-pondering about the status of the "King." I guess many of us were so excited by Kirby's return to Marvel that we were initially willing to accept any work he did. Kirby needs a strong editorial hand and a guiding writer. I also liked Pete's idea of Kirby collaborating with other talented Marvel artists for experimental graphics; a team of Kane and Kirby, for example, would be most interesting.

Jo Duffy's piece on super-heroines-- er, super-WOMEN-- in comics was enjoyable. I'm an old comics chauvinist who cut his "cheesecake" eye-teeth on SUPERGIRL stories, so I guess this article was a well-directed polite correction of my attitude towards women with super-powers. Jo defined her terms well and nicely followed up with a layout of the feminist scheme of things in different series.

I hope Jack Frost continues his CONFRONTATION articles. I love pondering over classic rivalries. His Cap/Skull short take and illoes had down-to-earth appeal.

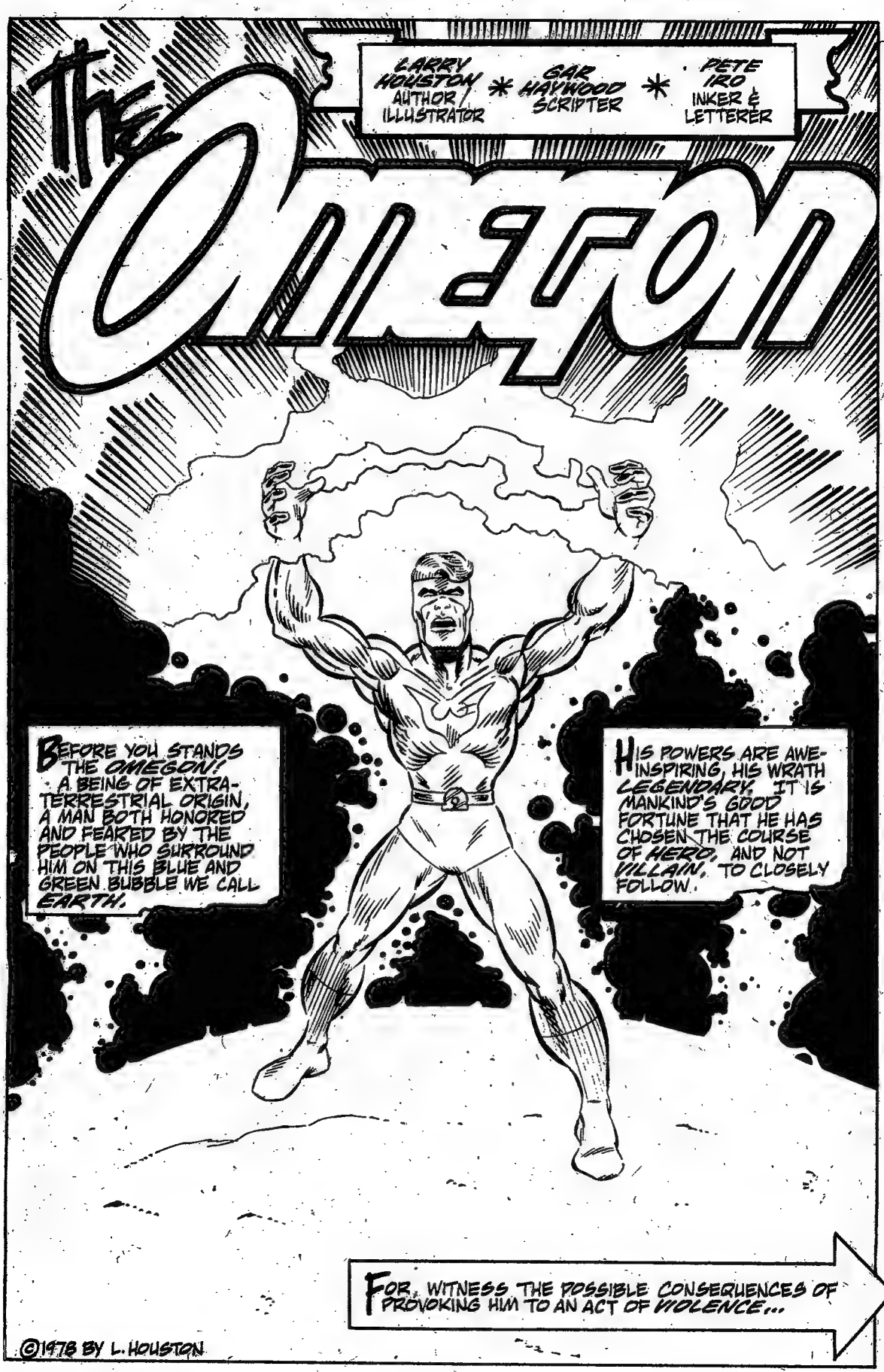
Let me also add praise for the marvelous SUPERMAN one-pager by Blyberg, the always welcome art of Tim Corrigan and the variety of drawings by Pete Iro, with an eye especially on the VALKYRIE.

Joseph A. Pilla

(Thanks, Joe. It seems as though everyone enjoyed our interview with Don McGregor. Don has asked me to thank eveyone who wrote in, for their interest in his work. Don, by the way, has teamed up with Paul Gulacy on a new character, SABRE, now out from Eclipse Enterprises, and will also be doing a book, DETECTIVES, INC. with Marshall Rogers for Eclipse.)

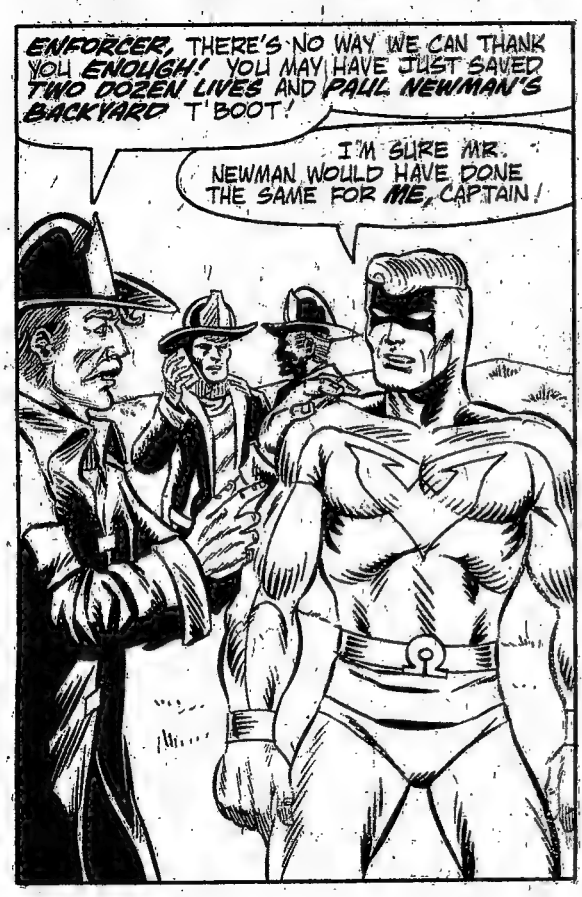
Well, that's about it for this issue, folks. Again, thanks for writing and 'til next time, take care,

DEAN M.


THE OMEGON
LARRY HOUSTON AUTHOR / ILLUSTRATOR
GAR HAYWOOD SCRIPTER
PETE IRO INKER & LETTERER
BEFORE YOU STANDS THE OMEGON! A BEING OF EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL ORIGIN, A MAN BOTH HONORED AND FEARED BY THE PEOPLE WHO SURROUND HIM ON THIS BLUE AND GREEN BUBBLE WE CALL EARTH.
HIS POWERS ARE AWE-INSPIRING, HIS WRATH LEGENDARY. IT IS MANKIND'S GOOD FORTUNE THAT HE HAS CHOSEN THE COURSE OF HERO, AND NOT VILLAIN, TO CLOSELY FOLLOW.
FOR, WITNESS THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PROVOKING HIM TO AN ACT OF VIOLENCE...
©1978 BY L. HOUSTON

...AN ACT OF DESTRUCTION!
OH, MAN!! HALF THE HILLSIDE WITH ONE BLAST, AND I DON'T THINK HE'S EVEN SWEATIN'!

HOW'S THAT FOR A FIREBREAK, EH, BOYS? IF THAT CHASM WON'T STOP THAT BLAZE DEAD IN HER TRACKS NOTHIN' WILL!
AND I THOUGHT PARTING THE RED SEA WAS A GOOD TRICK! WOW!


ENFORCER, THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN THANK YOU ENOUGH! YOU MAY HAVE JUST SAVED TWO DOZEN LIVES AND PALIL NEWMAN'S BACKYARD T'BOOT!
I'M SURE MR. NEWMAN WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME FOR ME, CAPTAIN!

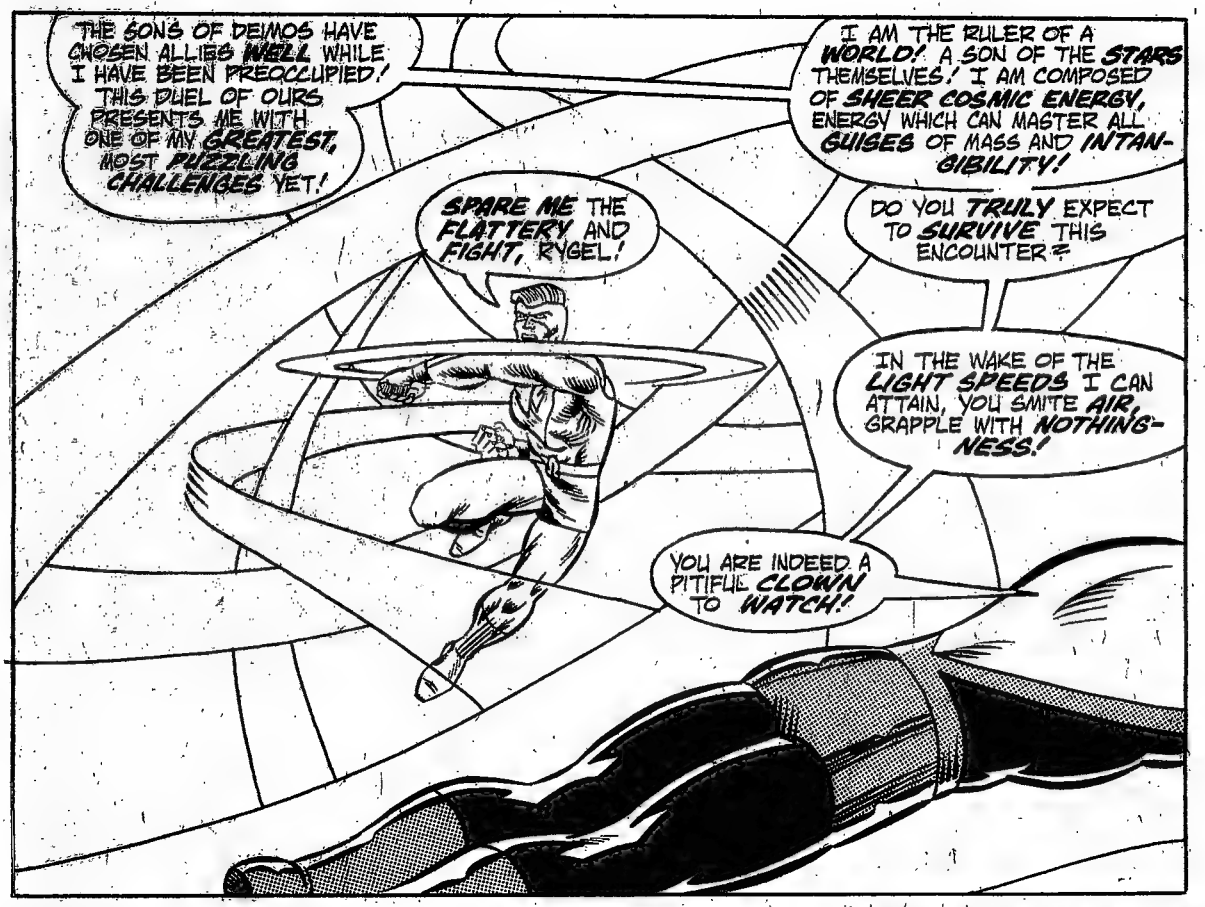
BUT AFTER THE OMEGON RECEIVES THANKS FROM THE CAPTAIN'S FELLOW FIRE-FIGHTERS...
THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SEE THIS, ENFORCER! LOOKS LIKE IT HAD BEEN BURIED UNDER THE EARTH FOR AGES 'TIL YOUR BLAST EXPOSED IT!
HMM...

I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS, CAPTAIN! I THINK WE HAD BETTER CLEAR THE IMMEDIATE AREA UNTIL ITS POTENTIAL DANGER CAN BE DETERMINED!
WILL DO, OMEGON!
IF THIS THING IS AT ALL RADIOACTIVE, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO SENSE IT!
I DETECT NO LETHAL RAYS, BUT I AM DEFINITELY PICKING UP SOME VIOLENT INTERNAL VIBRATIONS! AS IF IT'S MOLECULAR STABILITY WERE CHANGING RAPIDLY!
HMM...NEVER SEEN PAINT LIKE THIS BEFORE! SO...SHINY!
SORT OF...THREE-DIMENSIONAL! WONDER...WHAT IT FEELS LI--
HEY! THEY'RE GLOWIN'! I TOUCHED THE SYMBOLS... AND THEY'VE STARTED GLOWIN'!
CAPTAIN! NO! YOU'VE SET OFF A CHAIN-REACTION! THIS THING IS SUDDENLY GENERATING PURE COSMIC ENERGY! ENOUGH TO OBLITERATE THE ENTIRE CITY!
MY GOD, NO!!!
HOLY COW! WHAT THE HECK'S GOIN' ON NOW? IS THAT THE OMEGON AGAIN?
KOOM!
DAILY? THIS IS UNIT 27 AT THE HOLLYWOOD BRUSH FIRE! I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND HERE, BUT I THINK YOU'D BETTER SEND US A FEW MORE UNITS! AND QUICK!

BUT SUCH DESPERATE PLEAS ARE NOT TO BE ANSWERED IN TIME! FOR, WITH THE SUDDEN FLASH OF A BLINDING LIGHTNING BOLT...
FREEDOM!!
FREEDOM TO SEEK OUT MY ACCURSED ENEMIES AND PAY A GRAVE, AGE-OLD DEBT!
LET THE SONS OF DEIMOS BE FOREWARNED! THE TOUCH OF FATE IS AT HAND!
I AM RELEASED! I, PRINCE KYGEL-- THE MESON MAN!!
LONG HAVE I BEEN IMPRISONED! FOR TIME UNTOLD HAVE I BEEN REFUSED THE LIGHT OF DAY...
...BUT MY MEMORY SERVES ME STILL! AND I--I RE-MEMBER YOU, LACKEY!
--A GLEEFUL WITNESS TO MY ENTOMBMENT IN THE POD!
NO, MY FRIEND! YOU MAKE A SERIOUS MISTAKE!

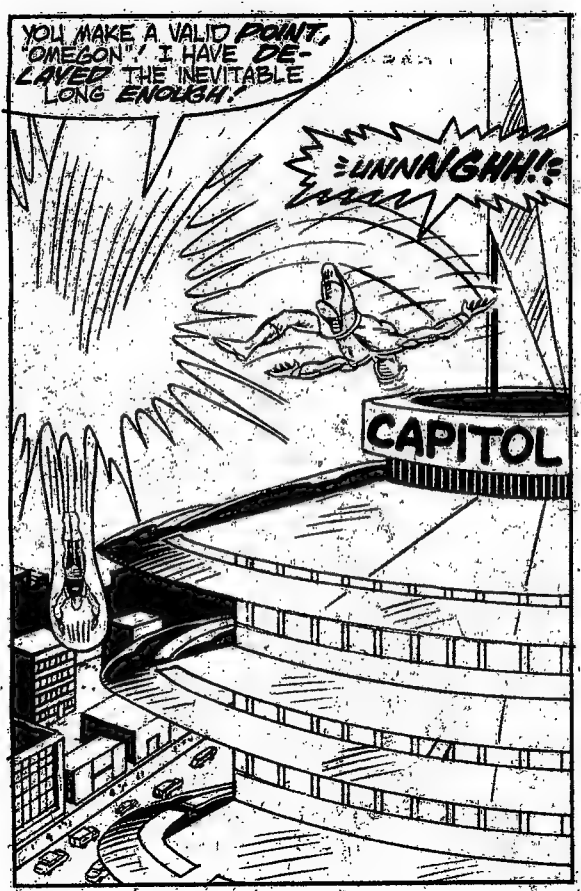
SILENCE!
I HAVE NO PATIENCE FOR AN INSOLENT THRALL OF DEIMOS! ONCE I BREACH THE WALLS OF YOUR MINUTE DEFENSES, NOTHING WILL STOP ME FROM MY SEARCH FOR JUSTICE!
ALIEN, YOU ERR DEEPLY! I AM THE OMEGON--"THRALL" TO NO MAN, AND DEFENDER OF THIS PLANET EARTH!
I SWEAR TO YOU BY MY HONOR AS AN ENFORCER THAT I MEAN YOU NO HA--
GARRGHH!!
YOU ARE AS SWIFT TO MOUTH LIES AS YOU ARE TO AVOID MY ANGER, FOOL ONE--
BUT AS YOU NOW SO PAINFULLY SEE, NO ESCAPE IS SUFFICIENT SHELTER FROM THE WRATH OF MY COSMIC POWER!
I AM NOT TO BE DENIED! CLEAR MY WAY TO YOUR BLACK MASTERS, HEATHENS! OFFER NO FURTHER RE-SISTENCE OR DIVERSION!
REMOVE YON COMPLEX BLOCKADES! DISPERSE OR DIE!!
YOU MINDLESS FOOL! THOSE ARE INNOCENT LIVES YOU THREATEN IN YOUR DEMENTED EXERCISE OF RAGE!
ONCE MORE I AM TAUGHT THE LESSON: REASON IS NOT FOR MADMEN! THE ONLY WAY TO REACH A TWISTED MIND IS THROUGH--
5.

--BATTLED
YAHHH!!!
YOU ALLUDE TO YOURSELF AS A "LORD"...
...AND YET PROJECT ALL THE NOBILITY OF SOME CRAZED WAR MONGER!
HOWEVER WELL JUSTIFIED YOUR SEETHING HATE MAY BE, I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO SUBJECT THE PEOPLE OF THIS PLANET TO ITS DEEDS!
LET THIS FINAL BOLT PUT AN END TO THE DISCOMFORT OF YOUR RAMPAGE!
I THINK NOT, COLORFUL ONE! NE'ER AGAIN WILL YOU SURPRISE THE MESON MAN WITH VIOLENCE!
COSMIC ENERGY INCARNATE IS INVULNERABLE, MY FRIEND! IT IS IMPERVIOUS TO ATTACK--
--AND UNYIELDING AS A BODILY WEAPON!

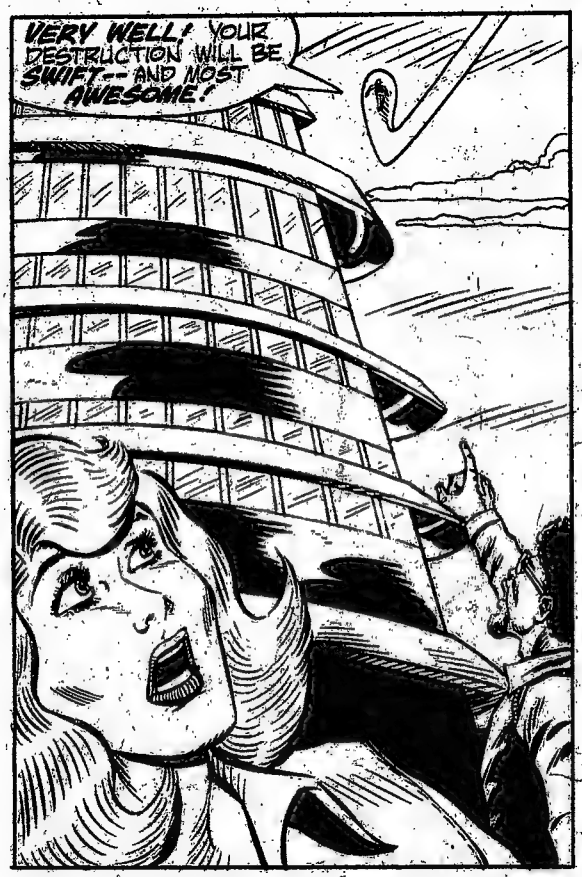

THE SONS OF DEIMOS HAVE CHOSEN ALLIES WELL WHILE I HAVE BEEN PREOCCUPIED! THIS DUEL OF OURS PRESENTS ME WITH ONE OF MY GREATEST, MOST PUZZLING CHALLENGES YET!
I AM THE RULER OF A WORLD! A SON OF THE STARS THEMSELVES! I AM COMPOSED OF SHEER COSMIC ENERGY, ENERGY WHICH CAN MASTER ALL GUISES OF MASS AND INTANGIBILITY!
SPARE ME THE FLATTERY AND FIGHT, RYGEL!
DO YOU TRULY EXPECT TO SURVIVE THIS ENCOUNTER?
IN THE WAKE OF THE LIGHT SPEEDS I CAN ATTAIN, YOU SMITE AIR, GRAPPLE WITH NOTHINGNESS!
YOU ARE INDEED A PITIFUL CLOWN TO WATCH!

BRAVADO, RYGEL! CONCEIT AND RHETORIC! ACTION ALONE WILL E'ER DEFEAT ME, BOISTEROUS VILLAIN! AND AS LONG AS I STAND YOU WILL GO NO FURTHER!

HEY, DAVE--LOOK!
THERE'S BEEN SOME KINDA EXPLOSION IN THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS! A BIG ONE, TOO!
YEAH? WELL I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT IT MUCH, MAMA!
HOLLYWOOD
PROBABLY JUST A COUPLE'A SUPERHEROES KNOCKIN' EACH OTHER AROUND SOME!
OHH...
...ALL BODY AND NO NO BRAIN! WHATTA WASTE!



THE CHOICE IS YOURS AT LAST: SURRENDER OR DIE! I WILL WASTE NOT ANOTHER SECOND ON PERSUASION!
THEN DO WHAT YOU WILL, RYGEL! THE OMEGON HAS NO NEED FOR "SURRENDER" UNDER ANY TERMS!



MY SHIELDS ARE WEAK! ANOTHER FRONTAL ASSAULT WILL DEMOLISH THEM--AND ME!
BUT TO STEP ASIDE WILL ALMOST SURELY MEAN THE DISINTEGRATION OF A CITY!
WHAT CAN I DO?!

NEXT "HOLOCAUST OVER HOLLYWOOD!!"

4 A.M. ON MANHATTAN'S UPPER WEST SIDE...
THE DRONE OF THE NIGHT IS PENETRATED..
BY STACCATO FOOTFALLS...
AND LABORED GASPS...
SLAV
GAS BLADE
BACK OFF--
OR I'LL--
THIS MAN IS SCARED WITLESS!
HE'S ABOUT TO--
CONCEPT, SCRIPT PENCILS:
MARK GRUENWALD
PLOT ASSIST: JOHN WILBURN
INKS: DENNIS JENSEN

ALL RIGHT, FELLA--YOU'D BEST TELL ME WHY YOU'RE RUNNING--
?
I DON'T BELIEVE IT...
SHE'S ON A BROOMSTICK! C-CAN'T GET AWAY--
SHE'S CLIMBING--GOING TO MAKE ANOTHER PASS!
SOMEHOW I NEVER EXPECTED MANHATTAN NIGHT LIFE TO BE LIKE THIS...
BUT THIS TIME SHE'S IN FOR A SURPRISE!
OF COURSE, I DOUBT MANHATTAN NIGHT LIFE EVER EXPECTED A DASHING GAY CAVALIER FROM THE MIDWEST, EITHER...

HE'S NOT DUCKING! NO TIME TO--
LIKE I'VE HIT SOMETHING SOLID!
ohhhhhh!!
A SUDDEN GUST OF WIND SEEMED TO BREAK HER FALL...
hmmm I'M NO CONNOSIEUR-- BUT THOSE SURE DON'T LOOK LIKE THE LEGS OF AN OLD WOMAN!
AND TO WHOM DO I OWE THIS PLEASURE--?
CALL ME... NIGHT NYMPH!
I MUST HAVE HIM!
BUT FIRST I WANT TO SEE WHAT HE CAN DO!

NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY!
THAT WAS MY FAVORITE BROOMSTICK, SWORDY!
...COMING AT ME FROM ALL SIDES...!
TOO MANY OF THEM TO STRIKE -- HAVE TO LET MY AURA DEFLECT THEM!
THAT DOES IT!
TAG! YOU'RE IT!
IT GETS ME PUNKED OFF TO HAVE TO RELY ON MY POWER!
THEY SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN ME--hmm, AND I THOUGHT THEY WERE TOGETHER!
YOU LOOK HOT UNDER THE COLLAR, SWEETIE!
What the f-
MAYBE THIS'LL COOL YOU OFF!

GYAAH! CAUGHT ME OFFGUARD... THE WATER CAN'T GET AT ME...
...BUT IT CAN SLAM ME AGAINST THE WALL!!!
"...FOR WHAT SHE DID TO MY BUDDY...
"MARTIN AND I WERE OUT CAROUSING WHEN HE MET...HER!
QUITE A DISH!
"TALK ABOUT EASY PICK-UPS! ONE DRINK AND HE WAS LEADING HER OUT THE DOOR!
"LUCKY STIFF, I THOUGHT.
"WHEN I GOT BACK TO OUR DIGS, I FOUND MARTIN... HE WAS DEAD...WITHERED LIKE A MUMMY... AS IF ALL HIS FLUIDS HAD BEEN SUCKED OUT...
"HAVING ACQUIRED THIS GUN, I'VE BEEN PROWLING THE BARS FOR HER EVERY NIGHT.
DAMN! SHOT OFF ALL MY SLUGS AT THE SWORDSMAN!
NOW'S MY CHANCE!
IF I HAD ANY SENSE, I'D GET OUTTA HERE WHILE I CAN...
...BUT I'VE GOT A SCORE TO SETTLE...
EXIT
NO TIME TO RELOAD! I'LL HAVE TO GET THE JUMP ON HER!

OOOF!
YOU SLIMY BITCH!
THIS OUGHTA...
uhhhhhhh
PRESSURE LET UP... SHE MUST HAVE TO CONCENTRATE!
Y-YOU'RE NOT EVEN WET!
NOTHING TOUCHES ME...
...UNLESS I WANT IT TO...!
NO MORE TRICKS! LET'S--
I'D LOVE TO CHAT--
--BUT I'M JUST ENJOYING MYSELF TOO MUCH!
MISSED!
I RIDE THE WIND!
OH, YES -- THE BROOM WAS JUST A PROP...

HEY, HANDSOME... COME AND GET ME-- IF YOU DARE! IT'S ONLY 4 STORIES!
FLAKY TWIT...
THIS IS JUST NOT MY NIGHT...
OH, WELL -- IT'S IN THE JOB, I GUESS!
YOU SURE TAKE YOUR TIME, SWEETIE! I WAS BEGINNING TO WORRY..!
?
I GROW WEARY OF THE CHASE!
YOU'VE WON FAIR AND SQUARE!
COME AND GET YOUR PRIZE...
LADY, YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG M--

Wha-- I-I CAN'T COME ANY CLOSER! SOMETHING WARM SURROUNDS YOU!
AS I TOLD YOU BEFORE-- NOTHING CAN TOUCH ME UNLESS I WANT IT TO...
BESIDES...
...YOU MUST BE DAFFY IF YOU HOPE TO ENTICE THE GAYBLADE!
GAY--? Oh, Christ--!
MY NEED IS GETTING INTENSE!
...IF I DON'T HAVE A MAN BY DAWN, MY POWERS WILL FADE!
MUST FIND SOMEONE ELSE!
I'M NOT LICKED YET, FAUNTLEROY! I'LL GET YOU IN THE END!
4:15 A.M. ON MANHATTAN'S UPPER WEST SIDE...
GONE... GUESS I BLEW THIS ONE...!
IF THIS IS ANY INDICATION WHAT SUPERHEROICS ARE LIKE IN NEW YORK...
I SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN THE MIDWEST!
THE END

PERILS & PUNCHES:

MEASURING ASIAN ROLES

by

BILL WU

I've had a number of letters appear since 1973 in Marvel, DC, Charlton, and even Atlas letter columns. All have referred to the presentation of Asians and Asian-Americans in comic book stories, usually critical but laudatory whenever possible. The intervening years have seen a variety of changes in the treatments of Asians in comics, including the appearance of the martial arts phenomenon, the return of major Yellow Peril-type characters, and an unchanging quality among many lesser roles. I'd like to review these developments not as specific items considered singly, but as a whole, against a general set of standards. Hopefully, others will then have a clearer understanding of why I consider some presentations offensive, some praiseworthy, and some a little of both.

Since stereotyped images are a major concern here, I'll start with them. Most people seem to agree that stereotypes are undesirable, but I'd like to suggest two reasons in particular why I find them damaging in regard to comic book Asians. These are most easily explained in reply to often-raised objections, such as:

"Comic books are a medium based on exaggeration, as indicated in the flashy costumes and excellent physical condition of almost everyone. Most villains are grotesque, regardless of heritage. Racial exaggerations are just a part of this."

Comic books do rely on exaggeration and visual symbolism. However, two items are different in regard to racial stereotypes. First, exaggerations based on occupation or economic level or geographic origin, which I also oppose, rely partly on explanation as well as appearance-- as with, say, a working class Ozark truck driver. Both in a comic book story and in real life, these factors can't be reliably determined just by looking; the reader or observer has to be told or shown these factors in some way. Then, even if personality characteristics are ascribed to such a person in a stereotyped fashion, the character has still been given some individualized identification, in the effort to show what sort of background the person has. With a character of a minority race, no explanation of the individual is required at all; a panel of art which indicates the heredity of the facially-distinct person does the job at once, and any traits which are indicated in the action of the story do not have to be explained in terms of personal background, but can simply be associated with looks. Therefore, racial exaggeration tends to treat characters with even less individualization than exaggeration and typing based on non-visual catagories.

The second item that's different is also derived from visual identification. Suppose we consider Asians in contrast to other ethnic and racial groups. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare agreed several years ago that "visible minorities" have had special problems from being visibly distinct-- after all, Irish immigrants once met tremendous ethnic prejudice, but that's disappeared with the generations. Without the brogue, an unnamed stranger of Irish ancestry is indistinguishable from many other Caucasian ethnic groups. On the other hand, visibly distinct groups that were in the U. S. much earlier are still struggling. How does that relate?

When Asians appear in the media, depicted as either good or bad, the association can be readily made with real-life Asian-Americans. I don't mean to imply that the reading public is so automatically gullible as to swallow whole whatever presentations they see; however, the media companies seem to understand the objection. For instance, Marvel presents the Yellow Claw and Fu Manchu not as people, but as villainous motifs representing the traditional fear of the Yellow Peril. This fear corresponds closely in many ways ways to the traditional fear of a Semitic conspiracy manipulating the world through economic power, but we haven't seen any evil Jewish financiers used as villainous motifs to represent this this. If such representations really are harmless and unobjectionable, why not? Or aren't they?

Certain recognizable types have appeared in comics consistently over the years. Among villains, the Yellow Peril's Fu Manchu and his copies predominate: the Yellow Claw, the Mandarin, and lesser foes such as the White Dragon. All of them mount super-science threats to take over the world, and the first two usually do so at the head of large-scale Asian conspiracies. Fu Manchu and the Yellow Claw act specifically to establish themselves as Asian powers, as opposed to the Mandarin, who is more of a lone, run-of-the-mill megalomaniac. The existence of these villains has been defended by several comic book

writers with this point:

"Every race has its good and bad people, with the the majority somewhere in the middle. Just because a villain is Asian doesn't mean that the role is nepresenting all Asians. Maybe it's just that the villain happens to be Asian."

Before the appearance of the martial arts comic book of the '70's, this defense was a joke. Sure, it's possible that the Mandarin and the Yellow Claw happened to be Asian, but if that's the the case, why weren't there heroes and heroines who just happened to be Asian? If the Asian villains existed from an awareness that all races include good and bad people, we should expect both sides to be represented equally.

The first significant appearance of protagonists with Asian ancestry occurred with the coming of the martial arts comic. We discovered that Fu Manchu had a son, who was half-Caucasian by Stan Lee's order, according to Mike Friedrich and other writers still at Marvel; DC's Karate Kid, a Legion of Super-heroes veteran, suddenly turned out to be half-Asian, now that it was in fashion. We also discovered, eventually, that half of the Vietnamese Mantis' origin was Caucasian as well. Full-blooded Asian ancestry was reserved for Lin Sun, the Son of the Tiger in Marvel's defunct black-and-white, Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu, for Charlton's defunct Yang, and at last for Master of Kung Fu's supporting character, Leiko Wu, the only one of the three who still appears.

The presentation of all these protagonists is a positive step; however, it's been taken on a banana peel. Pitfalls and pratfalls:

1.) The industry's Asian villains are all Asian. The Asian protagonosts, though, are frequently half-Caucasian as well. I consider this situation to be suspicious; if race has nothing to do with good or evil in a character, then both sides should have the same racial mix. In addition, one might recall that Luke Cage and the Black Panther were not required to be half-Caucasian heroes.

Incidentally, Doug Moench has deliberately ignored Shang-Chi's imposed mixed heritage, and deserves credit for presenting him as an Asian hero clearly involved with his background and training, unlike, for instance, Karate Kid. This remains unique.

2.) Many of DC's Asian villains belonged to a certain period in Denny O'Neil's writing-- the R'as Al-Ghul epic and Wonder Woman's era with I-Ching-- and they haven't reappeared very often. Non-recurring Asian villains appeared in Kung Fu Fighter, in Karate Kid's origin, and in the war comics, but DC is generally less involved with Asian villains now than before. This is especially good in the absence of a clearly functioning Asian protagonist with DC-- Karate Kid has no interest in his Asian heritage, and little of the appearance, so he doesn't fit the part. Recently, the Fu Manchu-appearing villain, Tzin-Tzin, returned once again, with the reminder in the story that he is Caucasian in reality. This fact has not been included in all of his appearances since his origin in 1968. He learned his secret abilities in Asia, and took on his costume and manner as a result of this. He might be more acceptable in the future if all his appearances include this racial disclaimer; however, considering his Ming-the-Merciless gown, his Fu Manchu mustache and fingernails, and his slanted eyes, the artwork belies the words. Any appearance without that disclaimer will still present him as an undiluted villain of the Yellow Peril mold.

3.) The Asian martial arts expert is a new stereotype, even though its creation of Asian protagonists is one good result. However, no good reason exists for why Asian protagonists would have to be martial artists. Two existing exceptions come to mind: one is Jimmy Woo, the FBI-SHIELD agent most recently seen in Godzilla; the other is Sunfire, the Japanese mutant. Jimmy Woo is a supporting character, and Sunfire has been an on-again, off-again good-bad guy. But generally, the events which have given superpowers to Caucasians, like radioactivity, mutant development, and chemical accidents, can just as easily happen to any other race.

Moench's Godzilla has other non-martial arts A-

sians, coming from the Japanese origin of the story, and he is presently the only comics writer involved in developing the characterization of Asians past the kung fu-karate image. These characters are not, however, super-heroes.

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The decision makers in the comics field have had certain reasons for resisting change. Perhaps the most influential concern is the notion that their reading audience cannot identify with Asian protagonists. This idea raises a number of issues all by itself.

Nationally, Asian-Americans have had a lower profile than some minorities, especially in the news. This, combined with the general ignorance in most of the population about Asian-American contributions as well as oppression, probably accounts for the scarcity of Asian protagonists. The central questions are: Will white readers not be able to identify with a full-blooded Asian hero? Or is it the appraisal by publishers of their readers unnecessarily low?

Bruce Lee was the first Asian hero to become a major star in this country. Therefore, non-Asian audiences cheering him on were usually cheering for an Asian for the first time. Since Shang-Chi has been presented as though he were a full-blooded Asian character, and he has been successful, one might argue that audiences have now been conditioned sufficiently by the martial arts entertainment to identify with Asian protagonists. Unfortunately, those who wish to see the opposite may also use Shang-Chi as an example, suggesting that he has been accepted because of his white American mother. Perhaps the most definite claim I can really make is simply that white audiences who applaud Bruce Lee in "Enter the Dragon" for smashing up a white villain are not locked into narrow racial thinking. Just as Asian-American audiences have had to do with Yellow Peril figures, they identify with the good guy versus the bad guy, regardless of race. I see no reason why this wouldn't pertain to comic book readers as well.

The presentation of half-Asian, half-white comic book characters is an obvious attempt to bridge a perceived gap between primarily white readers and full-blooded Asian roles. Significantly, this does not occur with Black heroes, with whom the subject of inter-racial couples meets much greater resistance. In regard to Asians, this solution appears to be an ideal one, since the characters combine a closeness to the white audience with an "exotic" quality that makes them distinct from all the other comic book figures. I have no objection to this development on its own terms, but I feel that it should be a part of the cast of Asian and Asian-American roles--not the single dominant feature. Again, the real question is whether or not a "bridge" of this type is necessary at all.

Basically, two scales exist for measuring the depiction of Asians in comics. One is to compare contemporary Asian roles with earlier ones, and I realize that improvements have been made: Lin Sun, Leiko, Moench's Shang-chi, others. On this scale, a few appearances make a big difference, as the Yellow Claw's recent stint in Nova and Tzin-Tzin's return engagement last fall with the Batman seemed to take the progress back a notch. The scale I'm more interested in compares Asian roles to Caucasian ones, and to Black ones. Here I find that Asians are still largely type-cast as Yellow Peril figures or martial arts experts; they still aren't acceptable as super-heroes. I find that they are more acceptable if they are half-white, where white and Black protagonists can be all white or Black. And I find that as the martial arts wave recedes, the number of Asian protagonists recedes with it, since this is the only field allowed them, while the Asian villains continue to thrive. These are the large issues governing the subject, and the ones by which the specific items, on the other scale, should be judged.